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REASONS AND REASONS

BY

JAMES MOFFATT, B.D., D.D., D.LITT.

"The candid incline to surmise of late
That the Christian faith may be false, I find; . . .
I still, to suppose it true, for my part
See reasons and reasons."

BROWNING: *Gold Hair*, XXIX.–XXX.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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I

THE GOD WHO IS ABOVE

If I beheld the sun when it shined,
Or the moon walking in brightness;
And my heart hath been secretly enticed,
And my mouth hath kissed my hand:
This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judges:
For I should have denied the God that is above.

JOB xxxi. 26–28.

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I

THE GOD WHO IS ABOVE

This also—this impulse of superstition, this secret sin of deference to material forces, is repudiated by Job. The other misdeeds come home to us across the centuries. He protests that he is innocent of sensual desire and act, of social injustice, of callousness and churlish conduct, of niggardliness and of hypocrisy. Most of these faults, even when they are inward, are luminous enough in any age. They beset wealth and power in every condition of the world. But the force of this temptation, or at any rate its form, is Oriental, and it can hardly be appreciated at once except by those who have had to live and travel in tropical or semi-tropical countries. Under our climate and civilization we can barely conceive the fascination, almost the tyranny, exercised over the primitive mind by these brilliant heavenly bodies which move through cloudless skies with unearthly grandeur, the emblems not simply of a weird beauty but of a varied power, since upon them the health and fortunes and even the movements of men largely depended. It is little wonder

that the sun and moon were worshipped in Arabia and in Assyria, and that this tempting superstition struggled up occasionally like a bright, foreign weed among the Hebrews themselves. Insensibly the sun and moon entered so directly into the business of life, that even a devout soul like Job, who was no votary of these shining bodies, found he had to resist, as an actual temptation, the impulse to wave a kiss to the upper lights—so obvious, so strong, so entrancing—that touched his life at almost every hour, very much as the Irish peasant of to-day, under some religious emotion drawn from the ancient paganism of his race, will furtively cross himself at the first sight of the new moon. The very habits of his neighbours would suggest some momentary act of adoration to the deities they honoured. It was difficult for him not to let his heart be secretly enticed by a prevalent superstition which was often almost indistinguishable from religious feeling, or to throw a hasty kiss to the great lights of comfort and terror which seemed the very masters of his existence.

An Oriental temptation! Yes, but men and women are being enticed to-day by precisely the same feeling which haunted the ancient nomad on the plains of the East, the feeling that, after all, things visible and outward present the standards by which life should be regulated. The great questions of the religious experience are

often old questions. For us they are newly shaped and differently stated, perhaps, but ultimately they remain the same. Analyze them, and they turn out to be perennial. It is still a moral discipline to resist the fascination of what meets and moves the senses. It is still a strain to refuse our moral reverence to the physical and material phenomena which bulk so largely in the scheme of our actual life. Over our work and pleasure alike they preside, not always gross or vulgar, thrusting themselves upon our notice, apparently owning no divine control, suggesting no higher providence, claiming to be considered, and appealing both to our sense of admiration and to our prudence. Take the things of this world in any of the practical and tangible shapes which affect our employment and enjoyment. They have a part to play in human life. "Blindness to the glory of the world and irreverence towards its spiritual forces are the worst of passports to any Church worthy of the name." For a Christian man to neglect or depreciate the significance of power or wealth or culture or art or trade or politics or science, is as disastrous as it would be for a traveller in the East to expose himself rashly to the sun, or for a nomad to regulate his nocturnal movements without heeding the phases of the moon. But for one person who suffers from such religious imprudence there are probably nine who are in danger of the opposite temptation to let

these interests become a substitute for God. In the State, in the Church, and in the family we are exposed—often to our great loss—to the dazzling prestige of the material world. It may usurp an importance in our minds to which it has no right, and we may be induced to let ourselves become engrossed with certain aspects of its brilliance and influence to the exclusion or the displacement of anything like that reverence for *the God who is above*, which is essential to Christianity.

Such a devotion to material interests will often seem a comparatively venial sin. It is less blamed because in many instances it does not come at once into action with the same grossness as the other offences from which Job, for example, clears himself in this defence. Most of these ripple the surface of life, like the ugly fin of a shark. But this is essentially a furtive offence. Primarily it is a secret compliance with existing superstitions. It is an estimate rather than an appetite, at the outset. For the world assails us by imposing on our imagination as well as by rousing our passions, and the former temptation may be admitted into life without producing immediately much visible change. It is a mark of the alert conscience to consider such a secret weakness as ominous and blameworthy as the coarser forms of evil. *This also were an iniquity.* In reality it is a temper opposed to all that is divine and devotional. Once we yield to it in our outlook

upon the world, this momentary impulse of deferring to material things will begin to affect our practical judgment and so to expand into a habit of the outward life.

Some are more liable to this temptation than others, owing to temperament, and the force of it varies according to circumstances. In one form it becomes a scientific materialism, in another the aggressively secular temper which longs to survey

> "The universal Nothing undisgraced
> By pert obtrusion of some old church-spire
> I' the distance."

But with people who, like Job, are neither speculative nor irreligious, it tends to become an almost involuntary susceptibility to the spirit of the age, which slowly saps the forces of self-sacrifice and prayer and spiritual enterprise. The splendour of the sun and moon thrills even the European traveller to a half-sympathy with the impulsive homage which an Oriental will pay to these heavenly bodies. All day long, with ache and glare, the heat which elsewhere ministers to luxuriant growth pours like scorching rain upon the sands. Night falls, and the moon succeeds this fiery torment with ruddy or silvery light for the wayfarer. Where can one escape the penetrating influence of these shining powers, which seem to have the earth at their mercy? So it is, in a corresponding sense, with the pageant of positive

objects and actual forces, full of colour and motion, which in modern civilization seem not so much to deny as to ignore God altogether, with their sweep of massed influence and tangible achievements, never absent from the spheres of human interest and imagination. They are so solid, so persuasive, so steady. You feel your heart sometimes flutter, in spite of itself, as a wave of secret delight comes over your better mind. "Here is real life," you are tempted to say; "here is something definite and substantial, to live for and to live by, a system of principles and aims which is both intelligible and promising."

Faith in the visible order of things has so much in its favour. Where the influence of the invisible is a tremor, outward things make an impact on the mind and heart. Their pressure is hardly ever relaxed. You have only to listen, to lift your eyes, to stretch out your hand, and there is the world of secular instincts and activities. You do not need to seek it; at every step its powers are thrown around you; they are not faint or hidden, they come up close to you in every enterprise and aim. And it does require a moral effort, particularly at certain moments, to retain the true perspective, to believe that there is a *God who is above*, a Presence and a control of the Spirit which has a higher claim upon our reverence than the most vivid of things outward and transitory. Many a religious character is ruined by nothing

more flagrant than a failure to resist this secret transference of worship from *the God who is above* to the fascinating powers and interests of the world. There is no reason why the devout man should not do justice to these. He may even, like Job, be prosperous and shrewd. Objects of the senses may tempt us to the pursuits of a cynical or sensual existence; they may lead to indolence or the pampering of the flesh or selfish ambition. But, like the sun and moon, they are set in the natural order for man's true welfare, and his must be the blame and shame if they are allowed to impose on the imagination and to capture the soul, till life is secretly enticed into a misplaced devotion. It is no small triumph to have the answer of a good conscience in this matter. To be able to repudiate *this also*, like Job, is a proof that as Christians we have learnt how to use the world without abusing it.

If, in one aspect, the advances of civilization have rendered this temptation more subtle and versatile for us than for the ancient Oriental, we have more than he had to keep before our minds and hearts *the God who is above* this pageant of imposing and dazzling phenomena, with all their loveliness and strength and order. In the teaching and spirit of Jesus Christ we possess unique resources for maintaining faith in the unseen. There are diverse ways of making, or rather of permitting, the invisible realities of grace and

reverence and service to stand out luminous and graphic before our minds. "The gospel of the blessed God," said Jonathan Edwards, "does not go abroad a-begging for its evidence so much as some think." Christianity furnishes us with reasons upon reasons for declining to transfer our homage from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to any of the great, shining powers that sweep across and over life with majestic control and imposing fascination. These reasons are implicit in its revelation of God and man as spiritually akin. God summons us to walk by faith and not by sight, and yet to walk through a world where this outward business and beauty is going on from day to day, charged with interest and help, stamped with divine approval. One voice bids us decry it all. But it is not a voice from Christianity, though it has been often taken up by Christians. Another voice whispers, "Worship this: it is all you need." But that is an inspiration from below. We dare not, as Christians, view this life except as Jesus viewed it, with His sense of proportion and His vision of God's kingdom as the first thing to be sought. To let anything in the world, even in the religious world, be more of a reality than the will and worship of the Father almighty is to deny Him. Do as Job did. Shrink from any impulse of hope or fear that tends to make God dim and distant, or to divide your homage between Him and

another. *This also were an iniquity*. It punishes, instead of enriching, the reality of your religion.

> "To start thee on thy outrunning race,
> Christ shows the splendour of His Face:
> What will that Face of splendour be
> When at the goal He welcomes thee?"

Who can tell that? Who does not thrill at the thought of it? But it will be nothing, and there will be no welcome at all, if we are failing here and now to maintain the vision of Him who is above all the sights and shows of the world, and allowing any other splendour to entice our hearts secretly from the high standards and requirements of Him who is the true Light of the world.

II

CONSIDERING JESUS

Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession even Jesus.—HEB. iii. 1.

II

CONSIDERING JESUS

THE Christian religion is marked off from other faiths by the place which it assigns to Jesus as the Christ of God. Christianity has truths in common with other religions, but its distinguishing quality is the function of Jesus, who has not only revealed the purpose of God finally, but realized it in Himself, and made it possible for men to attain their divine destiny. What Jesus thought of God determines our faith as nothing else can ever do, and what Jesus has done underlies the Christian effort and aspiration. This may sound obvious, but it is never irrelevant to the thought and practice of Christianity to lay stress upon His person as the basis and security of our hope, any more than when the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews summoned his readers, as *partakers of a heavenly calling*, to *consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus*. As Christians, we have our confession of faith. But to possess a confession or creed does not necessarily imply that we understand its significance or appreciate adequately its bearings. Speaking of

the country gentlemen under Charles the Second, and their love for the English Church, Macaulay remarks that "their love of the Church was not, indeed, the effect of study or meditation. Few among them could have given any reason, drawn from Scripture or ecclesiastical history, for adhering to her doctrines, her ritual, or her polity; nor were they, as a class, by any means strict observers of that code of morality which is common to all Christian sects. But the experience of many ages proves that men may be ready to fight to the death, and to persecute without pity, for a religion whose creed they do not understand, and whose precepts they habitually disobey." *Wherefore consider . . . Jesus.* Unless He is assigned His true place by those who draw up a creed, and unless those who accept that creed realize that it involves a personal consideration of their Lord in His absolute significance for their own lives, the gates are opened for an inrush of aberrations in theology and in practice.

By *the Apostle and High Priest of our confession* the writer means to express the double function of Jesus in our religion as God's messenger to us, and as our representative before Him, as the final interpreter of God's mind, and as the Redeemer who, by His sacrifice, has removed the sin which prevented His people from enjoying that unhindered access to God which it has been the aim of all religions to provide. The great subject of

the Christian confession is the oneness of man with God through Jesus, who has identified Himself with our race, and who alone is competent to carry out in us the purpose of our calling. Jesus guarantees to us that goodness is not a forlorn hope, nor a lonely enterprise. We no longer feel any difficulty about admitting His superiority in this respect to man or the angels. If we own Jesus as Lord, it is in a sense in which neither man nor angel can ever rival Him. But it is more easy to admit the supremacy of Jesus as Lord than to understand how that implies His human sympathy. To-day, as when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written, it is possible to glorify the work of Christ until, in our definitions, He tends to become more official than personal, or until His services are regarded as essential to some plan of salvation rather than as a true labour of love for men into which He put His very heart and soul.

Whenever, in the course of Christian theology, this tendency has become dominant, the Christian instinct has avenged itself for the injustice by breaking out in other directions to satisfy that passion for a personal and humane Lord, without which no construction of the Christian religion is adequate. Thus, when the mediæval confessions began to obscure the person of Jesus with sacramental forms, and to obliterate His real humanity in the regal offices of providence and redemption

which He was supposed to discharge; when, as Harnack puts it, the fundamental questions of salvation were not answered in relation to Him; the heart of piety swerved under the instincts of pagan religion to the adoration of the pitiful Virgin Mary, and called upon saints, who seemed more accessible to suffering flesh and blood than a distant, imperial Christ. A similar rebound took place later, under Channing and Theodore Parker, against the impression of remoteness and heartlessness made by the stern New England Christology. The Unitarian movement in one aspect meant that the orthodox presentation of "a cold Christ and tangled Trinities" could not satisfy faith. It was an extreme protest against an extreme confession of faith in which a Christ was set forth who, to all intents and purposes, seemed out of touch with living men.

Even when the articles of a creed do some justice to the humanity and sympathy of Jesus, a fresh personal consideration of His faithfulness and interest is always necessary to the strength and peace of the Christian life. As *partakers of the heavenly calling*, we encounter temptation and suffering in various forms. One effect of these experiences is to suggest a doubt whether people exposed to the common temptations of life, in their degrading and trivial phases, can have any part in the divine purpose. Another is the doubt whether God understands how we have to suffer,

and, if so, why He does not spare us much of what we have to undergo. It is against such fears and misconceptions that the human sympathy of Jesus is lifted, to rally Christians. Our confession of Jesus as *the Apostle and High Priest* implies that temptation and suffering may be a means of unity with God, instead of a barrier, that the Christian life of sonship has not only been sketched but realized by Jesus in the very conditions which surround us, and that He does not summon us to encounter any moral experience which He Himself never knew. *He is not ashamed to call us brothers.* As the writer has just said, His interest is in men of flesh and blood, not in angelic spirits. He has lived, and He lives, to enable us to fulfil our high calling, and, through the very experiences of temptation and suffering which seem to thwart us, to partake of the same grace which He Himself enjoyed. There is no phase of life so baffling or so obscure that we cannot count upon His presence with us.

These are fundamental truths of the faith we profess as Christians. *Wherefore*, in view of Christ's unwearied sympathy and faithful discharge of His vocation on earth, in view of His triumph over sin and death, *wherefore consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.* The writer does not speak as a priest; the sacerdotal attitude would have been incomprehensible to him. There is but one priest for him, *even*

Jesus, who shared our lot and carried through our interests to the end, till He could say, *It is finished*. Consider Him, he would urge, who in His love and in His pity redeemed us—for there is no redemption worth speaking of except that achieved through the personal identification of the Redeemer with the redeemed. Consider Him who has proved Himself competent to bring us through temptation and suffering to a richer experience of the divine life. Consider Him who has acted on God's behalf to us, and on our behalf towards God. It is in this intelligent consideration of Him that the conviction of His absolute and unrivalled value will grow upon the soul. Such a thoughtful, living grasp of what Jesus means will make Him real to us as nothing else can do. It helps us to understand that we need no one but this merciful and faithful Lord to bring us through the common discipline of life, however protracted and prosaic that may be. In his essay upon Cowper, Sainte-Beuve tries to account for Cowper's religious melancholy by his Protestantism. In reading the poet's lines, "To Mary," the French critic observes, we cannot help thinking of the other "Marie *par excellence*": "What Cowper lacked was trust in the Virgin Mary, who is all-pitiful and all-powerful with her Son. Had his heart been able to receive this further devotion, it would have succoured and perhaps saved him." But this is not a Christian

remedy; it is superstition. Cowper was at least sane enough to know the quarter in which to look for saving faith. He was rational enough to understand that Jesus requires no one to soften His heart towards men, or to fill out His interpretation of God's faithfulness, and we require no one but Him in our straits. *In that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able also to succour them that are tempted.* Our confession, so far as it is Christian, circles round these words: *He Himself.* And *therefore, brothers,* you who suffer disheartening because you are painfully conscious of being tempted, you who are tempted by your very sufferings of mind or body to doubt the reality of the divine care and wisdom, *consider Jesus.* There is no solution of the problem if He is left out. Given His experience, with its testimony to the character of God, there is no other direction in which the Christian requires to look. If you keep Him in mind, as your Lord and Leader, there is nothing He will not enable you to understand and to undergo.

III

THE GREAT LOVE OF GOD

God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus: for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, that no man should glory. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.—EPH. ii. 4–10.

III

THE GREAT LOVE OF GOD

THE faith of man and the great love of God are shown at work, in these rich words, but it is God's love which determines and inspires belief. "Faith," as Vinet points out, "does not consist in the belief that we are saved; it consists in the belief that we are loved." Now it is clear that the knowledge and persuasion of love in God as well as in our fellow-men must spring from an intelligent grasp of its purpose and actions, from a sense of the particular objects which it has in view and of the sacrifices which it is prepared to make in order to attain its end. The first revelation of God's great love is in His sacrifice for men. *God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us live together with Christ and raised us up with him. It is by grace that you have been saved.* Grace and mercy are love in action upon the sins of men. It is the crowning evidence of God's love that in Jesus Christ He has stooped to redeem us from our low estate. The word over the Christian is, *This my*

son was dead and is alive again. We have reason to believe that nothing short of the free and full grace of God could have brought us the saving power which underlies our whole existence and transforms us till we achieve our high destiny as His sons and daughters. We cannot lift ourselves to His level, and we dare not boast that we are entitled to His love. Its wealth is ours, in spite of what we have been and done. Behind and below our Christian experience the moral intensity of God throbs through Jesus Christ, persisting even amid the sins that deaden the soul and separate us in suspicion and disobedience from His heart. "In all eternity," wrote Pusey to a correspondent, "we can never love God enough for His forgiving love. I suppose that one of our feelings, as He unfolds to us more and more of His love, will be, 'This for me!'"

Thus we look back to Jesus Christ for the shining proof of God's serious concern. The reason for His personality and mission lies in the divine grace. His life reveals the greatness of God's love, the greatness of its aim as well as the greatness of its cost and care in raising men to the spiritual level. Those who know they are forgiven, and how they have been forgiven, are in possession of a conviction which assures them of Love with a force that outstrips all other evidence and triumphs over any doubt and hesitation. They know that in Christ a power of

God has come into play which is equal to the needs of man.

But this disclosure of God's lovingkindness is not isolated. From the first century onwards it has been unfolding and realizing itself, coming into fuller action within history and experience. The life of Jesus made it possible for the divine love to express itself adequately, and as time has gone on God has enabled men to see more than ever of what lay in His heart, by initiating them gradually, as they have been able to receive it, into the intensity and treasures of His affection. *That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* Many ages have come and gone since these words were written, very different ages from what the first Christians ever anticipated. But through ages of faith and degeneration alike the story of the Christian experience, in its vital forms, has been a steadily broadening appreciation of God's response to human need. The significance of the person of Jesus could only be grasped in its influence and effects upon mankind. It needed time to bring out the wealth and resources of His Spirit for the world. And throughout the ages over which we can look back it is possible to trace upon the whole a deepening sense of the grandeur of God's love in Jesus Christ, of its firmness and moral discipline, as well as of its consolations. There have been

phases of reaction and decline in Christianity, when men have hesitated to take God at His word. There have been, for example, doctrines of the atonement which have become a dead letter, mainly because they failed, for all their logical consistency, to rouse any sense of adoration and wonder before the love of God. But even when the Christian salvation has been misinterpreted or undervalued, even when men within the Church have thought more of their own efforts than of God's free gift, and spoken as if the Christian life could be self-inspired and self-supported, the evangelical note has rung out: *By grace you are saved, it is the gift of God.* Forgotten aspects of Jesus have repeatedly acquired new prominence through the devotion and insight of the saints. Hamlet, says Prof. Bradley, "usually speaks as one who accepts the received Christian ideas, yet when he meditates profoundly he seems to ignore them." There has been too much of this Hamlet-spirit in the Church. Yet her shortcomings have only thrown into more brilliant relief the quenchless patience of God's love, and the tenacity of His revelation. The vital truths of the faith have refused to be ignored for long. It has been a revelation to the world, as well as to the Church itself, how vital and undying is the sheer grace of God in Christ, often thwarted, often grieved, but never chilled by human imperfections. The influence of atavism has been strong.

But against this almost every generation has felt the stronger influence of the evangelical passion for grace as the central force of faith.

This ocean which stretches into the far horizon comes up to our very feet. The resources of the great love of God enter into our individual experience, and are to be verified there as well as in historical retrospect. We are saved *by faith, not by works*. True, but we are saved *for good works*, for an active participation in God's interests, for sympathy and co-operation with the objects of His love on earth. The grace of God is not only the power which makes us Christians at all, but the process and sphere of our moral training. We meet it in the details of our character and conduct. Redemption involves the creation of a new life with definite duties and interests of its own. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.* A moral personality, controlled by the spirit of Christ, is at once the outcome and the evidence of God's activity in Christ.

This is the third method of realizing practically what is involved in the great love of God. Love in Him as in our fellow-men invariably tends to produce a keener life. It is not mere fondness. It means moral training and new energy. It heightens every vital power, and intensifies our faculties. Those will realize His great love best

who find themselves inspired by it to take a firmer hold of their tasks and to understand how much richer and nobler life has become for them in the light of His redeeming will, with its impulse to self-sacrifice. If love determines God's relation to us, and if the end of love is fellowship, we see how the divine love, as expressed in Christianity, cannot rest satisfied short of creating human personalities which answer to the mind and purpose of Christ. Such is the career opened for the faith of man. Each of us has a vocation, to be inspired by the enterprise and devotion which are the breath of love. The vocation lies within the setting of the duties and demands imposed by our special sphere. There it is, and not in any moral vacuum, that a revelation of His love awaits the faithful conscience. Depend upon it, if our sense of that love is growing uncertain, it is often for no other reason than that we have slipped into the habit of taking our duties and occupations idly or unthinkingly, without seeing in them the precise discipline which He has assigned to us. In these *good works* we are meant to express and exercise our faith. Take them in the spirit of a vocation, and they witness to the reality of God's will.

> "Ah, little recks the labourer,
> How near his work is holding him to God,
> The loving Labourer through space and time."

Our consciousness of being in touch with God

would be deepened if we would only recognize that He has prepared the specific enterprise and exercise of duty for us, and is prepared to meet us face to face upon that line. Whatever love may be, it is dutiful; it assigns duties to others, and to itself. To ignore this truth is to miss one of the dimensions of His great love. To accept it is to reach a new degree of cheerfulness and effectiveness in our service of God and man. More than that, to believe *we are His workmanship*, here because we are needed for some end of His own, makes us aware of the wonderful precision and definiteness with which God uses the details of our individual lives to draw us into the destiny of our tie to Jesus Christ. *We are created in Christ Jesus for good works.* They are not irrelevant to our spiritual career any more than they were to His. If we understand anything of the moral energy which throbs in God's redeeming purpose, we shall grow more and more conscious that our duties are a vocation, and that they become for each of us a private interpretation of the great will of Love with its design and its demands.

IV

SEEKING AND SOUGHT

Behold, a greater than Jonah is here . . . behold, a greater than Solomon is here.—MATT. xii. 41, 42.

IV

SEEKING AND SOUGHT

The phase, "the claims of Jesus," is not very fortunate. It is apt to call up associations which are totally out of keeping with One who was never obtrusive or intrusive in dealing with the human conscience. But words like these breathe a conviction that His mission was final and critical, in the deepest sense. Jesus was conscious that all who came directly into contact with Him had a chance such as no previous ages had enjoyed, even within the history of Israel; and while this offered untold opportunities of moral growth, it also rendered the issues of life exceptionally serious. In His later teaching, especially, He seems to have laid more and more stress upon the responsibility involved in such an opportunity as His contemporaries possessed of entering into His revelation of God. For everything comes back, in the end, to men's estimate of Him. If Jesus is *despised and rejected*, despising always comes first in the order of experience; outward rejection is invariably the result of some inward depreciation.

There are two prominent phases or types of religious experience, by means of which the real significance of Jesus is appreciated. One is marked by compunction, the other by curiosity—that is, by curiosity in the form of moral reverence and aspiration. The characteristic note of the one is confession; of the other, quest. In Paul's phrase Jesus appears to some temperaments as God's power to stir repentance, while others, of a more inquiring nature, find it congenial to regard Him as God's wisdom. These are not to be distinguished as emotional and intellectual phases of religion. Repentance, after all, is a change of mind, and the quest for God has its own moments of compunction. Penitence is a revelation to man, of God and of himself, just as any genuine search for the truth of this life implies a break now and then with prejudices and a struggle with selfish habits. But we may roughly divide men and women according as the note of compunction or of inquiry predominates in them, owing to circumstances or training. Some are stirred and startled by what seems to be God breaking into their experience with an arresting appeal. Others conceive Him as sought rather than seeking, as the goal rather than as the goad of life; they are at first more conscious of their search for Him than of His search for them. But the point is that both are methods of coming into touch with One whose life lends

reality to ours, whether we are conscious of Him as besieging our reluctance or as satisfying our aspirations.

Behold, said Jesus, *a greater than Jonah is here.* If some people are ever to be religious, it would seem as though they required to be roused by some private or public thrust, some inroad, as it were, of God's spirit into their indifference. Jesus appealed to the old story of Jonah and the Ninevites. The prophet came, with a shattering summons to moral amendment, to the swarming inhabitants of Nineveh; he burst into its superb civilization and deep-rooted traditions. And he succeeded in disturbing the complacency of the people. *The men of Nineveh did repent at the preaching of Jonah.*

Christ also moves against the careless conscience. Through His spirit God is constantly taking the initiative in order to bring men back to right relations with Himself, disturbing their conventionality, and rendering them uneasy. *Behold, a greater than Jonah is here.* Jonah came to these Ninevites as a foreigner, while Jesus appears as one of ourselves. His work on the conscience is not that of an outsider, shrewd and critical, but of one who entered into the essence of our own experience. *A greater than Jonah?* Yes, for while Jonah did nothing save in words for Nineveh, and did even that service with reluctance, Jesus willingly proved His personal interest

by what He achieved and suffered on our behalf. Through the crowded bazars of the Assyrian city Jonah swept with his piercing cry, *Repent;* but no man was thrilled to lay down life at his feet for service, no woman sobbed out her despair and love before him, and no child was ever lifted to his arms. Stern and aloof, with "the loud cry of one who sees to one who sins," the prophet did his work. Great work? Yes, but not the greatest. He who is *greater than Jonah* had incomparably deeper ways of starting the rush of forgiveness which lifts life beyond complacency and despair. He knew how and when to touch those deep springs of feeling which well up to the saving of the soul. We are sometimes suspicious of appeals to feeling in religion, and our suspicions are not always unfounded. But the movement of the heart has its place in Christianity. The dread of emotion and the waste of emotion, which is more ominous in life? The latter, perhaps. Still, the former means that the soul is often starved. It is an error, this fear of being strongly moved either to contrition or to shame. There are cases in which no influence can so wisely bear upon our ways of evading any thought of God and of resisting the warnings of conscience, as the spirit of Him who, whatever traditions fail or creeds lose their moral power, moves in our midst, and as He moves, wakens the unreflecting, sometimes by tenderness, sometimes by the very mercy of

fear, to a sense of the honour and possibilities that lie within their lives.

Once again, Jesus has an incomparable attraction for those who, by training or disposition, are more active and energetic in their religious life. He quotes the story of the Arabian queen, which had so deeply impressed the Oriental mind. *She came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.* Foreigner though she was, the Queen of Sheba sought out the Jewish monarch, at any cost. *She came . . . And behold, a greater than Solomon is here.*

The point of the story is appreciation. Appreciation involves effort; life must be set in motion by a deliberate exercise of mind and will. *She came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.* It is never enough to live among the echoes of the religious world, or to content oneself with hearing of Jesus at second-hand. The essential condition for appreciating His wisdom for life is to come into touch with His personality, by that output of the sincere life which will face anything in order to arrive at the exact truth about God and itself. This, again, involves humility. We must come, not to patronize or criticize, but to learn. Otherwise our quest will never lead us beyond the early, shallow certainties that check our growth. But to nerve the soul for its enterprise, and sustain it in its zeal, Jesus promises entire success. *A greater*

than Solomon is here—here, in the world of our hopes and aspirations. These stirrings of our nature are not exotic. The intuitions of trust and holiness, the faculties of moral desire and reverence, the instinct of prayer, these correspond with the spirit of Christ. He is at once their sanction and their satisfaction. He pledges Himself to meet our genuine quest for the truth of God. Whoever fails, He will be at the place of wisdom and moral vision. His personality evokes and answers our religious need.

It is not superfluous to recall this wonderful consciousness of finality. For the authority of Jesus has been challenged even by some whose ardour in the quest for light and truth has not abated. "I look upon Christ," said Frederic Myers, "as a Revealer of Immortality absolutely unique, as the incomparable Pioneer of all Wisdom that shall be learned concerning unseen things. But, like the Norseman's discovery of America, his work grows more and more remote, and there are no sure sea-marks for others to follow along that legendary way. A new discovery is needed—to be made by no single Columbus, but by the whole set and strain of humanity." Were this true, it would mean that the Jesus who felt Himself to be greater than any previous revelation of God, had now succeeded in training humanity to be greater than Himself, by producing a moral sensitiveness which could

afford to dispense with the historical witness of His Spirit. It would imply, as the Mohammedan sages claim, that His place in the world's history is provisional, not final. From the gathered resources of our race we should be encouraged to draw strength and guidance for the moral and the spiritual problems of the future. Believe it who can, we cannot. We may know too little of Him, considering our length and wealth of opportunities, but we know Him better than to dream that He has been superseded in the leadership of men, in the work of recovering the soul from its disloyalty or of discovering to it the reaches of its growth into God's purpose. Nothing could be less promising than a religious movement whose motto is *A greater than Jesus*. He stands to us for a God who seeks, for a God who can be sought and found. Alike in our moments of compunction and of aspiration, we can verify His power of moving the cold heart and of satisfying our awakened instincts of purity and truth. He can do this as none else can. And for that reason we also repent when He comes to us; we also come to hear His wisdom as the last word on our lives.

V

THE BALCONY VIEW OF LIFE

Oh that I haa in the wilderness a lodging place oj wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them.—JER. ix. 2.

V

THE BALCONY VIEW OF LIFE

PYTHAGORAS was once asked contemptuously by a Greek tyrant who he was and what was his particular business in the world. The philosopher replied that at the Olympic games some people came to try for the prizes, some to dispose of their merchandise, some to enjoy themselves and meet their friends, and some to look on. "I," said Pythagoras, "am one of those who come to look on at life." Bacon, in telling the story, adds: "But men must know that in this theatre of man's life it is reserved only for God and angels to be lookers-on."

There are moments and moods when even a strong nature will feel tempted to escape, or to wish to escape, from the pressure of responsibility into a position where it would only be necessary to look on. Such was Jeremiah's case at this period of his career. He felt disappointed and disquieted with his age. He was at that critical phase of life when the first flush of enthusiasm, which throws men into eager contact with their fellows, has been succeeded by a profound sense

of the corruption and self-will and greed which sometimes thwart an enterprise of religious or national reform. He had failed to carry the people with him; he was unpopular; and he was disheartened. At one moment he was ready to weep for his land. *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!* That is the anguish of a true patriot over evils which are being allowed to eat away the heart of a nation, over the rampant selfishness which forgets the rights and claims of God or of one's fellow-men, over the indifference of people to human pain and to divine appeals. But sensitive natures pass rapidly from pathos to irritation. Another mood now seizes Jeremiah. He longs to get away from the whole business. *Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!* Now what does that cry mean? Not simply the craving to escape from the sordid ingratitude and intrigues of men into "God's free air and hope of better things." Not simply the longing to exchange social treachery and the unrealities of the religious world for nature's lonely, stedfast face in earth and sky, to hear nothing but the wind on the prairie and in the glens. Jeremiah does voice this disgust of a high-minded soul with the vices of a corrupt civilization, but his main thought is to be quit of

responsibilities. He yearns for *a lodging place of wayfaring men.* Not, mark you, for a hermit's lonely cottage, nor for some hut of a recluse beside the Dead Sea, but for a khan or caravanserai. The trade-routes had such places dotted along their course, where travellers and traders could put up for the night. The caravanserai was often a busy place, for all its cheerless furnishing; there would be men coming and going, hurrying on their pleasure or their business, merchants, court-officials, or ordinary travellers, full of news and alive with interests of every kind. There, thought Jeremiah, I could feel at home; I could content myself with letting things go unchallenged. He wanted evidently to be no more than a looker-on at life. He was tired not so much of human beings as of responsibility for any of them. Out on the steppes, in a khan, he could still keep in touch with some currents of existence, and yet be no more than a cool, indifferent spectator.

Jeremiah is far from us in time, but this morbid craving for the balcony view of life is not unknown to modern life. In a foreign hotel we can sit on the verandah, watching the play and movement of human nature with a refreshing sense of personal detachment. These people are no special concern of ours. We can laugh at them or with them, free from any feeling of responsibility for their doings. We are simply lookers-on for the time

being, and the sight of human foibles interests us without stirring an atom of serious obligation. We are nothing to these people, and they are nothing to us. Were we at home, it would be a different matter; but here we are not among our own people, and consequently we can afford to play the rôle of outside critics, who do not feel bound to interfere with any behaviour they may witness. The sight of these people stirs no uneasy sense that we should rouse ourselves to action.

This corresponds to a mood which sometimes comes over us, a mood of dissatisfaction in which we would do almost anything to throw off our responsibilities for others in the home, the Church, or the State. We feel this whenever stupidity and selfishness get on our nerves, and when we think we cannot stand the strain any longer or be of any use to our immediate circle. Sometimes we can carry out our wishes. We can resign and withdraw from certain lines of service, if things do not go exactly as we wanted. But in many cases where we cannot alter our situation, the craving smoulders in the soul, and makes us cynical and superior, as if we had the right to be scornfully indifferent to the whole business. It was not so with Jeremiah. His petulant irritation was only a passing mood. He recovered from it, as he realized after a while that God meant him to live among his kith and kin, suffering with them and for them as well as at their hands. In a passion

of despair he broke out with the cry, *Oh that I might leave my people!* But he did not leave them. He was too noble and generous at heart to become a mere looker-on. For this craving is a moral weakness. The heroic natures in every age are not seated on the balcony; they are down among their fellow-men, bearing the strain and stress of their position, identifying themselves willingly with the people among whom it may have pleased God to cast their lot, and brave enough to meet

> "The fierce confederate storm
> Of sorrow, barricaded evermore
> Within the walls of cities."

This heroic identification of himself with the interests of a faulty people marks out Jeremiah as a prototype of Jesus. When our Lord was on earth, some of His contemporaries were reminded of Jeremiah. *Whom do men say that I am? Some say, Jeremiah.* Why, we are not told. But for us Jesus resembles Jeremiah in this at least, that He did identify Himself, though in a far deeper degree, with the interests of a self-willed and rebellious people. He, too, shared their reproach and put up with their misunderstandings and ingratitude, in order to carry out God's purpose. He, too, had to meet and master the temptation to decline further association with their unfaithfulness. *O faithless and perverse genera-*

tion, He once broke out, *how long shall I be with you and bear with you!* There were moments when the incredulity and obstinacy of men were almost too much even for His great patience. But He triumphed over all such inclinations to disavow responsibility for His race. "Men must know that in this theatre of man's life it is reserved only for God and angels to be lookers-on." Must they? Can they not win a better knowledge from the revelation of our Lord? What does His life mean but that we have a God who is not content to be a looker-on, a God who identifies Himself to the uttermost with our eternal interests, a God who, instead of being our judge at the end and meantime the watcher of our little, foolish ways, enters into the heart of our struggle through Him who came to bear our sins and carry our sorrows? This is the gospel we receive from One who reminded men of Jeremiah —not of the Jeremiah who once longed to cast off his responsibilities, but of the greater Jeremiah who went back heroically to share his people's lot.

It is a gospel which forbids us to content ourselves, on any pretext, with looking on. The temptation of the balcony view of life is extraordinarily subtle. It appeals to our pride, to our sense of wounded dignity, and to our instincts of superiority, as well as to the mere love of ease. But it is beneath us. If, dispirited and disgusted, we do leave our people, thinking that we cannot

reasonably be expected to do any more for such a mean and thankless generation, we are leaving the spirit of Christ behind us. That spirit sends us back to the old duties with their irritation and their pressure. For it is inside these, not outside, that we can keep in touch with the presence of our Lord.

It is a gospel, also, which forbids any despair of ourselves. After what Jesus has done and suffered on our behalf, we never can suspect that God will leave His people, as if He could no longer bear to have any part or lot in their ungracious lives. Christ is still one with our race in the redeeming purpose of the Father. He does not hold aloof. He is no looker-on at the little tragedies and comedies of our existence. He has made Himself responsible for us; that is the strength and wonder of His gospel. He will not lose His interest in us, despite the errors and the emptiness of our days. He at least will never leave His people, such is the strong love and the longsuffering of His heart towards us.

VI

A DAUGHTER OF JACOB

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

JOHN iv. 10.

VI

A DAUGHTER OF JACOB

If thou knewest. But the woman of Samaria did not know. She failed as yet to realize her opportunity. She was on the edge of the supreme moment in her life, and apparently she could find nothing better to do than talk and tease, until it seemed as though she would actually allow the chance to pass, oblivious of its size and offer. For, as not unfrequently is the case in human experience, the turning-point came unawares. Nothing warned this woman of the significance which attached to the conversation or of the momentous possibilities with which she was trifling in her interview with Jesus. She had no presentiment, inward or outward, of the crisis. The sunlight flickering on the sand, the stones and water of the well, the common sights and sounds of the place, were as they had been on countless other days, and she herself had probably trudged out with her pitcher in that listless mood which renders people too dull to expect any fresh experience or any vital change.

If thou knewest. The keen sense of capacity

and aspiration may readily fade out of the religious life. Any thought of a God who is actually moving and speaking, or breaking into the circle of experience, is practically as foreign to some people as it was to this woman. And sometimes for much the same reason. The trouble is that they stand upon a level where religion is viewed mainly in the past or in the future, rather than as a force and factor in the realities of to-day. *Our father Jacob*, she exclaimed; and then, *when Messiah cometh.* As if religion could be resolved into historical traditions or apocalyptic hopes! She could talk glibly about both, but the single point of connection between her and contemporary religion evidently lay in religious controversies, upon which she spoke freely and sarcastically, under the influence of the same delusion which leads people to imagine they understand Christianity when they toss words in print or conversation upon religion and the Churches. Any notion of God's living presence or of His personal interest in herself had apparently ebbed out of her mind. She no longer expected anything immediate or great at the hand of God.

"I do not wonder," said Ruskin, "at what men suffer; but I wonder often at what they lose." They often suffer through what they lose, and, in religion especially, they often lose through their insensibility to God's power and grace of taking

the initiative. Many people, like this woman, find it extremely hard to believe in God's generosity and spontaneity. *If thou knewest the free gift of God.* Why do we not know it better? Perhaps because we, too, have allowed ourselves to become gradually absorbed in the sectarian animosities and vendettas of the religious world, so that the thought of an untrammelled boon for all tends to drop even out of our conception of God. Or, because our very sense of the need for personal effort has led us to exaggerate the functions of the human will in faith. Or again, because there may be some difficulty about a hearty belief in God's liberality and generosity. Paradoxical as it may seem, that belief has seldom been easy for human nature. It takes God to convince men of His spontaneous love. Primitive paganism, for example, was haunted by incurable suspicions of the gods. It is pathetic to notice the deliberate emphasis with which ancient legends will explain how comforts like fire and so forth had to be stolen or extorted from reluctant deities. Nothing, we may say, was further from the average pagan mind than the conception of a god who freely benefited men, or of one whose favour had not to be won by force or fraud. Survivals of this pagan spirit cling to human nature still. They reappear unconsciously in people who tacitly assume, in practice if not in theory, that the initiative in religion rests with men rather than with God.

"Think you 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking?"

Wordsworth's verse of remonstrance might be applied not unfairly to many people in the Christian world. To how many, it must be confessed, a God who may be found is really more credible than One who finds? How often a God who may be worshipped seems more intelligible than One who actually *seeks worshippers to worship Him?* Even upon a well-trained Christian belief, is it not occasionally a strain to preserve the simple confidence in a God who acts upon us and for us freely, in One who is not only a welcoming Father but a Redeemer who comes to seek and save the lost, in One who has access to us in ways beyond our consciousness? If we know life we can hardly deny this. It springs in many cases from our private experience of injury or neglect at the hands of our fellow-creatures. People, like this Samaritan woman, may start life with generous hopes and trustful affections which are rudely beaten down as advantage is taken by others of their good-nature; the result is that they learn to be suspicious of their neighbours, until frankness and graciousness ebb out of their relationships. They dole out gifts, as this woman doled out her tardy boon of water to the thirsty Jesus, perpetually on their guard against being

taken in or imposed upon. They even distrust any lavish profession of good-will. In the simplest offer no less than in the most ordinary request they suspect ulterior designs. And the further mischief and misery is that this spirit reacts upon our conception of God, till a certain reluctance is associated with Him, as though He, too, bargained somehow with men, instead of seeking their good ungrudgingly; we behave as though His demands were no more straightforward than His offers were disinterested.

Jesus meets this temper by revealing His own personality. *If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that is speaking to thee.* The free gift of God is simply God giving and giving of Himself in Jesus. God spared not His Son, and the Son spared not Himself, to make the gift real to men. Only, as none of the higher gifts can be received without some sensitiveness or capacity in the receiver—for an influence is not received like a flower or a coin—the preliminary task of God is to stir in men, as in this puzzled, heedless woman, those feelings of uneasiness and wistfulness which are the earliest symptoms of a diviner change. Such is the process of our discipline. It is the spirit of Jesus which thus renders us uncomfortable and disturbs our lower satisfaction. Jesus and this woman met that afternoon. *Then cometh he . . . to the well. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water.*

But His thirst for her awoke before her thirst for Him, and that proved the saving of her. He was a stranger to her, but she soon discovered that her life was neither strange nor indifferent to Him. In the last resort everything goes back to that, to a faith in God's generosity and insight, excited and justified by the impression which the life and spirit of Jesus make upon our individual lives. As soon as a human soul has any vital sense of that, he asks and never asks in vain for help. To be understood and trusted by a single human being may often prove the beginning of moral redemption for blunted and lowered lives. And who can set limits to the regenerating power of a belief that God has still interest and confidence in us? Men are justified by God's faith in them as well as by their faith in Him. They awaken at times to find themselves believing in Him, clinging desperately to hope and goodness, in spite of their unpromising past and their as unpromising present, because He generously believes in them. Jesus is their living proof of this undeserved and unchanging love in God. He assures them that man's life with God is larger than the struggle of the soul to reach and persuade God of its great need. *My soul followeth hard after thee.* In the order of experience we are often conscious of our own efforts, of our prayers and aspirations, first of all. But we soon learn what underlies these mental

and moral struggles; we add, *Thy right hand upholdeth me.* It is God's personal touch which sustains us even in our most spontaneous and instinctive moments. And how much more in our apathy, when it stirs the conscience! What though we have felt the heartlessness of other people, the moral emptiness that follows self-indulgence, or the drudgery and vicissitudes of life? What though we are prejudiced and ignorant and shallow? What of all that, when under our vain and vacant moods, beneath the rubbish of trivial interests and vulgar circumstances, Christ is here to stir, in our bewildered and stained characters, a fountain of fresh hope towards God? He gets behind our evasions and levity for nothing else. He works on us with the tact and patience of love for that very purpose of moral regeneration.

Now, to realize this is the pivot on which everything may turn. *If thou knewest!* This woman came to know it. *Our father Jacob*, she said, and she was a truer daughter of Jacob than she understood. As her ancestor once awoke in a strange place to find God had been beside him, though he knew it not, so, centuries later, did this woman of Sychar realize the presence of Christ with a start of wonder. And so, centuries later still, do we. On us, as on her, life's revelations often surge along some ordinary, simple channel, unexpectedly. Most people are familiar with the experi-

ence of being disappointed over some notable place or person. The visit is made with keen anticipation, yet some will return pretty much as they went, curiously unmoved, ready perhaps to blame themselves or other people for the failure of their high hopes. The event has failed to come up to what they were led to expect. But, on the other hand, it is equally a truth and law of experience that some of the most regenerating impulses and the noblest influences which touch our life to finer issues reach us through the door of what is mechanical or casual.

> "God comes to us
> With every day, with every star that rises ;
> In every moment dwells the Righteous,
> And starts upon the soul with sweet surprises."

Such moments vary in their intensity, but they all contribute to that heightening of our sense of personal value which is tantamount in the religious sphere to a keener sense of the divine presence in us and with us. Often it is the change from a conventional and vague expectation to a definite experience of one who has searched and known us, from *When Messiah comes he will tell us all things* to *See a man who told me all things that ever I did.* Strangely and suddenly, through a conversation, or a reverie in some glen or lane, through a phrase of music, a text of scripture, a sentence in some book, God visits us as He visited

our sister at Samaria with a noiseless, arresting experience, a reaction against our lower self, a sudden flash revealing new possibilities, a disturbance of our languor and prejudices; in a moment life seems to fall apart, leaving us face to face with a Presence that will not be put by; the inertia of things is broken up; the meaning of Jesus starts up through the letters of our commonplace religion; through some casual and ordinary event, as it were, the presence of the living God becomes real and near and dear to us, and we go back to life from these pregnant, precious moments, with something—something intimate and holy that makes the world a new place to us ever afterwards. Like this daughter of Jacob we learn that no failures in the past need disqualify us for such an experience of God's power in Jesus. Such is the wonder and wealth of human life, as it lies beset by God in Christ, that none of us forfeits entirely the chance of coming thus face to face with His appeal, and none is beyond the reach of Him who stoops to win men from their shallowness and apathy, who is here to give them heaven on earth, and give it for the asking.

VII

HOW GOD IS PAID

The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof.—MATT. viii. 8.

VII

HOW GOD IS PAID

He was, we should have said, a most deserving man. His Jewish neighbours gave him, of their own accord, a certificate for friendliness and generosity, as well as for religious tolerance. *He is worthy*, they protested, *that thou shouldest do this for him: for he loveth our nation, and himself built our synagogue.* No man, in their judgment, could have a stronger claim on the good offices of the Jewish prophet, especially as his request was unselfish. It confirms the impression of this officer's excellent character, to find that he was interested in his servant's health. *My servant lieth at home sick.*

Nevertheless, he felt himself unworthy. Luke tells us that in his diffidence he actually got the local elders to plead for him, and, when Jesus moved in his direction, his modesty shrank from the thought of troubling the great prophet any further. *Lord*, his message ran, *trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: wherefore neither thought I*

myself worthy to come to thee; only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.

This was no formula of Oriental courtesy. Still less was it an expression of false modesty. The officer betrays neither self-complacency nor affectation; he does not fall into the self-depreciation which is really another form of egotism. What he sincerely felt, owing to the impression made upon him by Jesus, was that his popularity gave him no title to make undue claims upon the Lord.

This feeling is the evidence of a sound nature. Popular esteem rests upon the recognition of merit. It is on the basis of our achievements and services, or what seem to be such, that other people sum up in our favour. But—

> "Merit lives from man to man,
> And not from man, O Lord, to Thee."

The good opinion of men is an invaluable asset; still, we need to guard against the secret inward elation which it may foster, against the tendency which leads us to think we can turn to face God with the same self-satisfaction which our relations with men may seem to justify. A new humility has to control life towards God. It is not a pose of insincerity, nor an attempt to lash our feelings into unreal self-accusation. It is simply the recognition of the truth about ourselves, as that is disclosed in the gospel, the new sense of

proportion which is aroused whenever our life crosses the life of Jesus. The grace of God in Christ lays our conceit low. His good-will overpowers us with its wonder and magnificence, and the uppermost feeling in our hearts, as we meet it, is that we do not deserve such generosity. Instinctively we say, *Lord, I am not worthy*. All we can plead is our need of Him.

It is with God's love, after all, as with the love of man; we discover that we must be content to accept it simply and modestly as a gift which we feel we do not and cannot ever deserve. The astonishing loyalty, the trust, the forbearance, the superb generosity of human love, are a revelation which comes over us now and then with a positive rush of wonder. What are we to have received so wonderful an affection? What did this man, what did this woman, see in me to move such devoted love? We are not to be envied if we have never felt this sense of undeserved goodness at the hands of those who are near and dear to us, a feeling in which every thought of personal credit is submerged. The generous kindness of God has the same effect upon the human soul. In His presence we can only put aside our pride and shame and take what He offers, grateful for it, resolved to be more worthy of it, but conscious, nevertheless, that it is far beyond what we deserve. That is how His love seeks to be requited.

"What blessings Thy free bounty gives
Let me not cast away;
For God is paid when man receives."

These lines of Pope reach to the heart of this relation between the Giver and the receiver. It is a vain thing to work away in some corner of piety, anxious till we can produce an amount of worthiness which may make us feel justified in coming forward eventually to accept God's bounty. He is paid as we receive His goodness simply. You cannot appreciate it rightly? You cannot claim it as your due? You cannot think yourself worthy of it yet? Well, it would not be grace if you could. And because it is grace, the grace of love, it asks only to be taken on its own terms.

The sense of personal unworthiness is a genuine instinct, but it may become morbid. It may produce a scrupulosity which is untrue to the artless relations of God and His people. Dr. Dale once said an acute thing on this point, with regard to Maurice. What Maurice really wanted, he said, was "to be conscious that he deserved all the love and trust that came to him." Now, Dale added wisely, "I am more and more clear about this, that we must be content to know that the best things come to us both from man and God without our deserving them. We are under grace, not under law. Not until we have beaten down our pride and self-assertion, so as to be able

to take everything from earth and heaven just as a child takes everything, without raising the question, Do I deserve this or not? or rather, with the habitual conviction that we deserve nothing and are content that it should be so, do we get into right relations either with our Father in heaven or with the brothers and sisters round about us." This is not presumptuousness. It is simply the reverent and direct attitude of men and women who are not too proud to take God at His word and receive a grace which sweeps aside all misgivings just as it inspires them to real worthiness of conduct. Never think you must somehow deserve God's fellowship before you can enjoy it. No one, indeed, can enjoy it without a conscience for gratitude and consistency of life. But no self-depreciation or scruples must be allowed to deter you from receiving it: He is paid as you receive His bounty. Don't be too proud to take the gift, as He loves to give it, without a thought of merit. It is beautiful and honourable in one sense to think about meriting it, but that will only come in the natural order as you yield to its power over your heart and soul. Who that has known what love is, has ever dreamt that he deserved it? Who that has known what love means, has ever quite abandoned the hope and effort to be more worthy of so divine a gift?

VIII

THE CUSTOMS OF JESUS

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast.—LUKE ii. 42.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day.—LUKE iv. 16.

And he went, as his custom was, unto the mount of Olives.
LUKE xxii. 39.

VIII

THE CUSTOMS OF JESUS

THREE times in the course of his Gospel Luke alludes to the place of customs in the religious life of Jesus.

To begin with, Jesus was born into a family of definitely religious habits. *His parents went every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they* [accompanied by Him] *went up, after the custom of the feast.* Every head of a household in the provinces, who was strictly pious, made a conscience of attending yearly at least one of the great festivals in Jerusalem, and, although the obligation was not binding upon women, Mary seems to have obeyed the recommendation of some rabbis like Hillel and accompanied her husband. Year after year their annual absence from home marked the routine of the carpenter's household in Nazareth. The children knew why their parents went away for these weeks. When Jesus reached the age of twelve, He became a son of the Law, and for the first time took part in the annual custom of the pilgrimage.

It was in the soil of such devout family religion as we know existed among many Jews of the age that the piety of our Lord struck root. And this is normally the beginning of all religious education. The first phase of it is associated with our most receptive years, when we receive more than we are conscious of. "However we may work at our religious faith later in life, criticize it, remodel it"—and Jesus did both—"we must first receive it. That we have a religious life to-day is not due to our philosophers and men of science, many of whom had no religion. It is due to the fact that we learned to believe as children. We do not believe at first because it seems to us good to believe or reasonable to believe, but because we are taught to believe." Such teaching ultimately depends, in the large majority of cases, upon early impressions of faith and reverence made by the devout order and regularity with which the practices of the Christian life and worship are observed within the home. The child's religion needs to be nourished by the sense that faith in God is as stable and natural and constant as any function of the household. When this impression is made, during the years in which the instinct of imitation is strongest, religious habits are readily and unconsciously formed; they are made for us by our seniors, and they acquire a sanction and binding power just because we can never recollect a time when they were not acting upon our lives.

Nature itself, says Pascal, may be only a first custom, as custom is a second nature. Perhaps it is because these first customs are formed so early that they are often one of the last things from which we part.

But, while religion is transmitted to us along the channels of custom and tradition, it cannot remain a mere inheritance which is taken over automatically from the earlier generation. Often our early habits have to be modified or changed, in order to suit the larger needs of life, and even when we continue to adhere to the letter and detail of the old habits, we require to put into them the consent and purpose of our own characters. These inherited beliefs and practices—or such of them as we can retain—must be made our own, in the period of individual responsibility. Luke is careful to note this advance in the religious life of Jesus. Twice he implies that our Lord not only received customs from His parents, but made customs for Himself.

The first of these was connected with public worship. *He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day.* Evidently the changes which had taken place in His residence and responsibilities had not interfered with His religious habits. As a boy He had been trained from the age of four to attend the local synagogue with His parents, and now, as a

man, He continued the custom wherever He went, not from use or wont, in any mechanical fashion, but as a method of His own religious life. Though He had come back *in the power of the Spirit*, fully endowed and inspired for a unique work of God, He continued to frequent the place of common worship. He saw infinitely more in the word and revelation of God than His fellow-worshippers. The rites were simple and archaic. Nevertheless, He made it His custom still to join in the old habits and to keep up the practices of public service. And this is more significant than we sometimes realize. It is a reminder of the truth which, in our fancied spirituality, we are apt to forget—that the holiest personal life can scarcely afford to dispense with stated forms of devotion, and that the regular public worship of the Church, for all its local imperfections and dulness, is a divine provision for sustaining the individual soul. We cannot affect to be wiser than our Lord in this matter. If any one could have pled that his spiritual experience was so lofty that it did not require the stimulus of public worship, if any one might have felt that the consecration and communion of his personal life exempted him from what ordinary mortals needed, it was Jesus. But He made no such plea. Sabbath after Sabbath even He was found in the place of worship, side by side with God's average people, not for the mere sake of setting a good example, but for the

deeper reasons of fellowship with God and man. Is it reasonable, then, that any of us should think we can safely afford to dispense with the pious custom of regular participation in the common worship of our locality?

Luke mentions yet another custom, which flowed side by side with this through the religious life of Jesus. When He left the upper room, on the last night of His life, *He went, as his custom was, to the mount of Olives.* Why? Not simply to be quiet, away from the close atmosphere and din of the crowded city. He doubtless welcomed the hush and coolness of Nature, but He also drew strength from the associations of personal devotion with which He had already hallowed the garden. It had evidently been His custom, recently, to retire thither for meditation and communion with the Father. The spot was therefore consecrated for Him by His experiences.

We might practise the same habit with advantage in our Christian life; in addition to the custom of public worship, it would be well for us to endeavour to connect our private devotion with definite places, either inside a room of the house or outside with Nature, like Jonathan Edwards, who paced the banks of the Hudson, and Leighton, who walked up and down beside the Allan Water. Human nature has a strange faculty for spoiling or for hallowing its surroundings. We know how the associations of a place may become, through

death or change, or even through personal wrong-doing, so unbearable to us that we almost shrink from revisiting the former scenes. They may become invested with too painful memories and associations. But this tie of place and heart can affect us for better as well as for worse. A spot or locality is very much to us what we choose to make it, and we may stamp the outward environment of life with a mysterious virtue and grace, which acts like a spell upon the mind whenever we go to our special surroundings. They may speak to us of strength and peace and reverence, just on account of their associations with a secret experience which is between us and God.

Doubtless, prayer and fellowship are not tied to any locality. Jesus was as near to the Father in Jerusalem as anywhere; He did not require the sights and sounds of the garden to recall God to His mind; but is it not significant that even He turned in the hour of His spiritual conflict to the place at which for some time He had been accustomed to be specially conscious of God's presence? Human experience generally finds it helpful to employ this practice of devotion. Wherever our lot chances to be cast, even for a short time, in town or country, it is wise for us to consecrate some spot, indoors or out of doors, where we can concentrate our minds in order to feel specially alone with God. If we do so, the very associations of the place will soothe and lift us. We

may be inclined at first to regard this as fanciful or sentimental; but once more we cannot afford to dispense with a habit which Jesus plainly found essential to the poise of His religious life. The tie of place and heart enters into our most spiritual phases of devotion, and as we form it we shall probably discover that our life is gathering round it in such places an atmosphere which is charged with singularly deep and vital influences, influences that help to draw us readily and almost inevitably into the sense of our Father's peace and presence.

IX

THE GREAT ESTIMATE OF JESUS

Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.
LUKE xxii. 28.

IX

THE GREAT ESTIMATE OF JESUS

EVENING is the time for reflection, and when people are on the verge of parting they are often more inclined to recall the past, with its grave and bright experiences, than to anticipate the future. Jesus, sitting with His disciples on the night before His death, cast His thoughts backward as well as forward. He spoke of the future, in order to encourage and direct his followers. He warned them against making pathos and regret the keynote of their faith. For—

> "Whether we be young or old,
> Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
> Is with infinitude, and only there:
> With hope it is, hope that can never die,
> Effort, and expectation, and desire,
> And something evermore about to be."

Jesus gave them the assurance that great issues were in store for them, since He had control of their destiny; *I bequeath to you a kingdom.* But He also turned their thoughts to the days behind, and spoke for a moment of the part they had played in the life which He was now leaving upon earth. *You are the men who have stood by me*

in my temptations. That is the great estimate of Jesus.

It is an estimate of His own life. We sometimes speak about *the* temptations of Jesus, as if the threefold experience which the gospels chronicle at the opening of His ministry were the only period of temptation through which He had to pass, until He came to the garden of Gethsemane; but these temptations were probably over before any of the disciples had joined Him, and in any case the long interval between the two crises had its own discipline. The story of the three temptations does not exhaust the trials to His fidelity which Jesus encountered; it merely summarizes some of the most characteristic. He was tempted by enthusiasm and zeal to lower His religion to the popular level, tempted to falter and draw back from the line of the Cross, tempted to lose patience with men, tempted by loneliness, tempted by those who cared most for Him—some of His subtlest temptations were whispered from the lips of His mother and His greatest friends. *He suffered, being tempted.* He was keenly sensitive to the characteristic desires and passions of our nature. Of all this inner experience He rarely spoke to others. The deeper a nature is, the less demonstrative and voluble it is about such matters. But it is remarkable that, when He does take His disciples into His confidence, the word He chooses for His life is not "my

achievements," not "my disappointments," not "my hardships," but *my temptations*.

The disciples had witnessed some of them. They knew how He had been flattered and threatened. They were aware of the strong influences which had been brought to bear upon Him, in order to force Him to abandon or to modify His mission; but they cannot have had any conception of the continuous pressure against which He had to contend for His faith and service. People seldom realize that the outside work of life may have to be carried on, while inwardly the soul is fighting a battle of its own against subtle treachery and weakness of will. Even Jesus had to repel the ordinary temptations of trouble and happiness, as He went about His mission. They were intensely real to Him, though few suspected, from His strong, calm character, that He had repeatedly to overcome the shrinking from pain and the instinct for joy which are natural to our being.

Some of life's difficulties cannot be hidden. They are more or less public property, and, as our friends see us face to face with them, their sympathy, spoken or unspoken, nerves us to bear the strain. But how many temptations assail us, of which even those near to us know nothing! They know nothing, and they ought to know nothing. Part of our discipline is to meet and master such impulses in secret. It would not

help us, in many cases, to canvass for sympathy, carrying the cup of misery round our circle in order to get it sweetened. Nor would it be fair to our relatives and friends to insist upon them sharing every item of our private conflicts. The strong soul knows when to be reticent, for its own sake and for the sake of others. Many a man or woman in their own way can echo that word of Jesus: *my temptations.* Sometimes it looks as if life consisted of little else, or as if no one realized how much we have to try our faith and patience. We are above the weakness which likes to parade its doubts and troubles. We have to keep a brave front to the outside world, while the heart within is often sick and afraid. Well, it is a strength to remember that, while other people may never suspect the weight of our difficulties or even imagine we have anything special to fight against, we are passing through a moral experience akin to that of Jesus. He went through that trial, and His spirit is with us in the ordeal.

Once more. He had a generous estimate of His disciples. *You are the men who have continued with me in my temptations.* They were at His side that evening. But they might not have been there. One of them, as He spoke, was hurrying along the dark streets to betray Him. Others, over the country, had fallen away from Him because He had disappointed their private

hopes or put too severe a strain upon their endurance. Now, cowardice is apt to be infectious; it easily spreads among the members of a society. Jesus therefore appreciated the more highly those who had survived the sifting of His mission. He knew how easy it was for human nature to give way, and He recognized that it said a great deal for these men that they had lasted to the end.

Their loyalty, indeed, had not always been intelligent. More than once they had doubted His wisdom and even hesitated for a moment; but they had never gone back, and Jesus generously appreciated the support of their staunch perseverance. He could stand alone. But He had no proud indifference to human sympathy; He never disguised His sensitiveness to affection or His desire for companionship in a crisis, and therefore, whenever the disciples could offer Him, if not counsel, at least sturdy belief in His cause, He welcomed it eagerly. Faithfulness of this order, like charity, covers many a defect. "Believe me," Charlotte Brontë wrote to Mrs. Gaskell, "though I was born in April, the month of cloud and sunshine, I am not changeful. My spirits are unequal, and sometimes I speak vehemently, and sometimes I say nothing at all; but I have a steady regard for you, and if you will let the cloud and shower pass by, be sure the sun is always behind, obscured, but still existing." Faithfulness is accompanied in some natures by a

certain sternness or even brusqueness of manner; for the most charming and demonstrative people are not invariably the most reliable. The willow has a smoother stem than the oak. But the willow bends. Faithfulness does not mean even that rebukes and reproaches are unknown. The disciples had more than once drawn such upon themselves, by their dulness, or prejudice, or ambition. Only a moment before, they had been quarrelling like children over a question of precedence. But under all these flaws, the generosity and insight of Jesus marked the redeeming feature of their life as a whole: they had lasted.

You are the men who have stood by me in my temptations. Possibly some of them felt a trifle ashamed to receive such praise. They may have remembered how little use they had been to Jesus at the crucial moments of His career, and how inadequately they had supported Him. We must all have such reflections about ourselves. A sincere heart almost shrinks from being praised. The thanks we get seem far too generous. We are ashamed to think how little we have done to deserve the recognition we receive from God or from our fellows. But, in the estimate of life, as Jesus made it, loyalty stands out conspicuous. "Whatever else you have done or left undone, of which you may be ashamed, you have done one thing of which I am proud: *you have continued with me in my temptations.*"

Ordinary life cannot be full of dazzling exploits or striking words. But it is a great thing in the sight of God—we might almost say it is the great thing—to be at our post, and to keep at our post through the vicissitudes and monotony of the long hours, to maintain the Christian outlook upon life, in spite of all temptations to fall back on lower standards, to act steadily upon definite Christian motives, and to subordinate personal hopes and fears to the interests of the cause with which God has honoured us in the spirit and the company of Jesus.

X

LOYALTY TO GOD

Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom.—1 KINGS ii. 28.

X

LOYALTY TO GOD

Most of us start with early ideals of faith in God and man which, in the generous hours of youth, we pledge ourselves to hold in practice no less than in theory. We are prepared to stand by them. But it is not enough to commit and consecrate ourselves to the Christian enterprise at the outset. Although our inexperience will hardly credit it, ideals may be lost, and lost they will be unless we are alert to renew them, or rather to renew our hold of them as life opens out into responsibilities and interests which repeatedly create a new situation for our moral growth. If we imagine that faithfulness to God or man goes on by a momentum of its own, we are in danger of the error which covered Joab with sudden disgrace at the end of his career.

Joab has been called the Douglas of the house of David. He was the staunch and skilful general, without whose aid the monarchy would not have been established. He had his faults. He was vindictive and imperious, but he was fiercely loyal to the king, and at the critical moment when Absalom's rebellion broke out he

saved the situation by siding with David and refusing to swerve from his chief. *He turned not after* the brilliant young *Absalom.* Yet, some years later, towards the close of David's reign, when another rebellion tested his principles, *he turned after Adonijah.* This time he failed. He had lost none of his early rashness, says Ewald, and probably Adonijah had promised to forgive his earlier offences. The loyalty which had carried him through one reign did not, at any rate, stand the strain of another. He sided with the upstart and was ignominiously put to death as a traitor. The pity of it! To tarnish his record on the last page! To grow infatuated over a poor creature like Adonijah after resisting the fascination of Absalom!

Yet people may thus succumb to the temptations of mature life, after passing successfully through earlier seductions. *He turned after Adonijah, though he had not turned after Absalom.* Why is that true of many careers? Partly because people are not sufficiently alive to the changing forms and phases of temptation. These vary, in character or in intensity, with successive periods in life. Youth, for example, is more in danger of recklessness and impulsiveness; age, of obstinacy or of a disposition to cultivate its own garden, indifferent to the troubles of other people. "I could be sorry for these men," says the ex-Abbot Boniface at Dundrennan, "ay, and for that

poor queen; but what avail earthly sorrows to a man of fourscore?—and it is a rare dropping morning for the early colewort." Feeling is less easily stirred as we mature, and this accounts for a change of our temptations. Ridicule, again, tells more upon our early years than on our later, as a rule. Vanity, which is one of the most serious dangers to loyalty, reappears in old age as well as in youth. But a fault like avarice is more common in mature life, and so is cynicism, which is rarely anything but an affectation in young people. There are even physical reasons why certain temptations to irritability and sluggishness acquire a firmer hold upon the more advanced phases of human character. Celibates will sometimes confess, for example, that the vow of abstinence from marriage presses upon them with special heaviness about the age of forty. In short, temptations to selfishness or compromise or self-indulgence, which ten or twenty years ago would have been brushed aside, may appeal to us to-day with an unwonted power of attraction which it requires all our moral strength to resist. Marriage, family life, the duties of a profession, the pressure of new responsibilities, the anxieties of a high position, the larger freedom of success—these may create a moral situation which requires to be thought out afresh in the light of our devotion to God, if we are keen to prevent any weakness from getting an unsuspected grasp of our

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natures. Philip Doddridge began his great consecration hymn with the glowing lines—

> "O happy day that fixed my choice
> On Thee, my Saviour, and my God!"

But he ended by declaring—

> "High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
> That vow renewed shall daily hear."

There is a profound wisdom in this resolve to renew the early loyalty from time to time. Such a type of piety will be above the reproach of being no more than an initial spasm followed by a chronic inertia.

But when the first flush of consecration is upon us, we find it difficult to take such warnings seriously. We are apt almost to resent the suggestion that we could possibly be tempted to prove faithless to our vows or to abate one jot of our enthusiasm. It is natural to think we have decided our future, and that the lower self, over which we have triumphed, cannot reassert itself. The consciousness that we have taken our stand openly, at some cost to ourselves, thrills us with a sense of permanence. Instinctively we protest, with Peter, *Though all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended.* We shrink from the mere thought of treachery as though it were a reflection upon our honesty.

Now, it is true that every decision imparts an impulse and strength to our moral nature. The

early consecration does become a power of heart and will. Only, as we enter into life, faith in God presents itself as a much more complex business than it at first appeared; besides, old temptations have a way of rising up again, after the romance of the start has subsided; a time arrives when we have to encounter the resistance and monotony of the world, the apparent indifference of many to what we cherish, the disappointing lives of our associates, the subtle temptations which incline us to consider self-sacrifice rather quixotic after all, enthusiasm a fever of childhood, and faith a boyish dream. These things have to be met. They may embitter our zeal, or shake our faith, or cool our interest. They can turn—they have turned—men and women from early loyalty to God and from chivalrous devotion to the interests of their fellow-men. And if they are to be surmounted by us without faltering, it must be by taking the oath of loyalty over again, with a more intelligent grasp of all that it involves. *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* Joab fell. *He turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom.* And any one may swerve from loyalty if he presumes upon his past exploits, or assumes that the momentum of yesterday will avail of itself to carry him through the seductions of to-day.

No one, however experienced, can afford to live on the mere memory and credit of an earlier

devotion. We dare not take for granted that our motives are as pure as they once were. Circumstances alter, and we will do well to suspect that our characters may have also altered—not always for the better—that we may have become insensibly less disinterested and trustworthy. We may be baptizing prejudice in the name of principle, or thinking ourselves tolerant when we have really become lax; in fact, almost every development of life brings with it the possibility of unfaithfulness, at some point or other, to the early ideal. And the call is, to renew our vows in face of the novel circumstances. You do that instinctively at the outward crises of life, when you are married, when your children are born and when they go to school, on the occasion of a death in your home, or when your work is altered. But there are crises which are equally momentous, though they are not so well marked—crises which are profoundly significant for moral and spiritual loyalty. The man who has a faithful conscience will be on the lookout for these imperceptible changes, lest they render his will unstable or dim his powers of judgment. Particularly as the conditions of his lot grow comparatively prosperous and smooth, he will take care in case the fibre of self-sacrifice be softened, or the heart grow callous.

Joab turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. He had perhaps one excuse which is never ours. His master had ceased to

be heroic. The old age of David is not a lovely spectacle, and Solomon inherited some of his father's least admirable traits. Joab, in the last phase or dotage of David, can hardly have found much to command his hero-worship, and this may explain in part his unaccountable lapse from loyalty. The Son of David to whom our fealty is pledged puts no such strain upon His followers. On the contrary, we find more and more reason for our loyalty to His service, as the rising problems of every age call out fresh aspects of the gospel which inspire self-sacrifice and elicit the highest energies of mind and soul in Christian men. No, if we turn aside from Christ, or abate our confidence in His cause, ours is the discredit of the lapse. But surely we will not fail Him now, perhaps after years of honourable service. Some of us may be just where Joab was, with a good record behind us and the last treacherous temptations of middle age rising beside us. Let us say to ourselves and to one another, "You won't give way at the close? You won't spoil your record by dropping the old flag at this time of day? For what is faithfulness to God or man worth if it is not faithfulness to death, a faithfulness that will not betray Him or desert Him in the afternoon or in the evening any more than in the morning hours?"

XI

FAITH AND LOVE THEIR OWN DEFENCE

Putting on the breastplate of faith and love.—1 THESS. v. 8.

XI

FAITH AND LOVE THEIR OWN DEFENCE

LIFE, as we find it lived, appears able at times to inflict such wounds on faith in the goodness of God or man, that it is no wonder people are acutely sensible of the dangers to which the events and intercourse of the world expose the Christian temper of trust in God and of that forgiving, generous disposition inspired by genuine belief. What can we do, they will ask, to safeguard the spiritual mind? In the long run you can do nothing, Paul replies, except—believe and love, go on believing in spite of appearances, go on loving your fellow-men in face of disappointing experiences at their hands. Faith is its own corselet, and so is love. They are fit to bear any contact with the world of men and things, if only you will put them on. This coat of mail, which protects the vital organs, is not an artificial device, added to their nature. *Let us put on*, says Paul, *the corselet of faith and love*. He means that they are useless if they are not brought directly into touch with the facts of life. The worst enemy of personal religion is not some outside combina-

tion of circumstances, nor even a theory of determinism which threatens to evaporate responsibility, but the inward indolence which turns Christianity from a force into a form, the rust of disuse which deprives it of practical value by hesitating to put it into action. Montaigne, said Dean Church, "has the power of suspending absolutely his belief and the natural effect it would have on a thoughtful mind busy with man's nature and fortunes." We have all that mischievous power, and it is when people hang up faith and love in the armoury, leaving them to become fine theories or beautiful ideals which are no longer ready to cope with actual existence, that their religious life is doomed to lose its strength and nerve. *Let us put on the corselet of faith and love.* That is the only way to possess and honour them. Use them or you lose them, and in losing them you lose yourself.

The Christian must arm himself. There are some things which no one can do for another, and this is one of them. The State may interpose to prevent Christianity from being unfairly treated; Paul frankly recognized that help in his own career. But such a defence of the faith neither creates nor sustains personal religion. Creeds have their place and function, but it is notorious that behind the most elaborate and orthodox articles of a confession the spirit of personal Christianity may readily decline. The organiza-

tion of the Church is a real aid to faith and love; none knew better than Paul the vital support and stimulus afforded by social fellowship to individual Christians. Nevertheless, the only faith which ultimately avails is the faith of personal convictions verified in experience and brought into action on the field of real life. The services of theology and institutions are not to be undervalued in the apology for the Christian faith, but they need to be informed by a spirit which is not of themselves. Their influence requires to be supplemented by the practical conduct of individual Christians, which, after all, is the most telling reason for the faith that is in us. Of theology and institutions in Christianity we may almost say what Cavour once said of political apologetic: "To every one his work. The philosopher and the economist, in the seclusion of their studies, will confute the errors of communism; but their labour will bear no fruit unless men practise the great principle of universal benevolence, and act upon the heart while science acts upon the intellect." It is the practical exercise of Christian faith and love which alone makes the efforts of a theoretic apology for our religion successful. The latter must be accompanied by a display of vital energy in the sphere of personal religion.

Furthermore, the very organization of the Church, which enlarges our personal faith and affords a sphere for the love inspired by faith, may

be almost as much of a trial as a help in certain cases. Membership of a Church may reveal, as people come into close relations, some of the most irritating and petty traits in human nature. It often invigorates us with the stimulus of example and comradeship, but it as often discloses faults and foibles. It may—it frequently does—throw us into touch with people with whom it is extremely difficult to get on. They provoke us to lose temper and patience. They cool our generous hopes of men. There is a temptation to distrust or even to despise some of our fellow-Christians, when, like these believers at Thessalonica, we discover to our annoyance that our charity is being abused, our advice ignored, our motives unfairly judged, our forbearance taken advantage of by the unscrupulous, and our services received without much gratitude. This is where the danger of cynicism and selfishness lies in wait for us, with that heart-burning and resentment which are the very destruction of the soul. There is nothing for it but to meet such people steadily upon Christian terms. We must let our religion determine our estimate of the world and our attitude towards it. Nothing but love, after all, can keep love alive. It is only as we continue to work with people and for them under the obligations of the Lord in whom we believe, that we can manage to ward off the deadly onset of suspicion and indifference.

To think and act with such unswerving generosity means courage of a high order. That is why love of this heroic, unflagging nature depends on faith, just as real faith in turn will not survive the collapse of love. The one is organic to the other. *Let us put on faith and love as our corselet*, the love which respects men for the sake and in the strength of the Christ, their Lord and ours, in whom we ourselves believe. Faith and love have no other function in this world. Whatever we do with them, we have to live by them. That is the only way in which they can be living for us. Otherwise they have no reason for existence. They are armour, not decorations, and any attempt to suspend or abate their influence over the real motives and interests of our life means a defeat and a retreat from our high calling. In this life of Christianity we are liable at any stage to encounter deadly wounds from scepticism and selfishness. The very enterprise and excellence of the faith exposes us with special force to some of these temptations. But should any of us imagine that Christian faith and love are fragile, delicate qualities, which require artificial protection from the outside if they are to survive contact with the rude world of men and things, it is because we are not venturing to put them bravely into action, and to see how much they can stand. Their practice is their best protection.

XII

THE ONLY SCHOOL?

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you.—PHIL. iv. 8, 9.

XII

THE ONLY SCHOOL?

These glowing words come with an unbroken rush from the apostle. But we feel instinctively a difference in their tone. The first sentence, with its passion for the beauty and range of the moral ideal, might almost have been written by a Greek sage; the second sentence could only have come from a Jew, or at least from a Christian who had been born within Judaism. Yet both sentences flow together here. "It is," as a critic of the New Testament observes, "it is as if we heard the ripple of the waves at the meeting of the two streams which have their source in Zion and the Parthenon."

But there is a deeper difference still between the outlook of the two verses. In the former Paul lifts the eyes of his readers to the vista of moral goodness. *Whatever is true, whatever is to be revered, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is gracious, whatever is high-toned, whatever excellence or object of due praise there is, think upon all this.* Then he adds, *Whatever you*

learned and received from me, whatever you heard me say, whatever you saw me do, do that yourselves; and the God of peace shall be with you. Reflection provides the initiative and the standard for conduct. *Think . . . do.* But the influence of right ideas and lofty aims is also backed up by the force of personal example, as if the one naturally supplemented the other.

There was a special reason for this emphasis upon example. Paul was the first Christian these people had ever seen. Their earliest impressions of Christianity were associated with the apostle. As Cowper wrote of Wolfe, he had

> "Put so much of his heart into his act,
> That his example had a magnet's force,
> And all were swift to follow whom all loved."

In the mission-field, as well as in the early stages of moral education, we can verify this principle. At a certain period truths come home to the mind and conscience most effectively through their embodiment in personal character, and hero-worship witnesses to the same law in the higher reaches of maturer life. Repeatedly we are drawn to some duty or roused to some aspiration by observing the presence of these in a noble character. It is no longer a question of things but of persons. One great function, not simply of biography and history but of our friendships and intercourse, is to stir life with a power which

abstract claims of virtue could scarcely exert over us. Think, for instance, of all that lay behind the young Italians of last century who, in the struggle for their country's freedom, died, confessing their faith in "God, Mazzini and Duty!" Consider what Mazzini must have been to them, when they could realize God and duty best through their experience of their leader. On far less heroic levels we can hope to enter into such a feeling of personal enthusiasm and indebtedness. We do not always realize what is noblest and purest in life, and, even when we do, it does not follow that we are attracted by it. But when we find principles and aims represented by some human character which we can touch and watch, we often respond to this influence, and, out of loyalty and admiration for living men and women, set ourselves to high attainments. Most people at one time or another in the course of their lives have understood better what God's mercy and patience mean, by having come under the spell of a human soul which, for all its defects and limitations, has been able to make these truths live in act as well as in word and statement. "I have to-day seen the face of Garibaldi," said Madame Meuricoffre, "and all the devotion of his friends is made as clear as day to me. One could love the cause without seeing him, but in seeing him you seem to be suddenly gifted with the power of seeing it as he sees it, and you love it better

for his sake, while you wholly honour and admire him for its sake."

This debt involves a similar debt on our part to some people in our circle. They should be in a position to quote our character in favour of our creed, and we ought to be able to put forward our lives before those who look up to us, as a pledge for what we believe. It is our duty so to live with them that they shall somehow be able to associate us with their conceptions of what God expects and receives from a human soul. The exercise of this influence means an absence of pretension and self-consciousness; it depends upon the impression which others feel of our absolute sincerity and unselfishness in the pursuit of the high ends to which we summon our fellows; for no one is ever impressive if he is always thinking about making an impression or if he parades his virtues with an air of superiority. But, above all, it involves consistency—that is, a humble and resolute effort to tolerate no gap between what we know and what we do. "There may be," says Stevenson, "something more finely sensitive in the modern humour, that tends more and more to withdraw a man's personality from the lessons he inculcates, or the cause he has espoused; but there is a loss herewith of wholesome responsibility; and when we find in the works of Knox, as in the epistles of Paul, the man himself standing nakedly forward, courting

and anticipating criticism, putting his character, as it were, in pledge for the sincerity of his doctrine, we had best waive the question of delicacy, and make our acknowledgments for a lesson of courage, not unnecessary in these days of anonymous criticism, and much light, otherwise unattainable, on the spirit in which great movements are initiated and carried on." There are some natures whom we can only help by saying not simply, *Think about moral goodness*, but *Do what I do, and God will be with you. The God of peace will be with you;* you will be at harmony with yourselves and with your surroundings. That is much more than a primitive lever of education. What makes us often hesitate to use it is not so much a feeling of modesty as a sense of the patent incongruity between our belief and our conduct, not so much a fear of subtle pride as a consciousness of the discrepancies which might render the lever useless and ridiculous among those who know us best.

A much more honourable reason for hesitation is the fear of destroying individuality of character. Strong natures like Paul, Calvin, Loyola and Wesley have been often charged with the ambition of casting others in their own moulds and, by the sheer force of their personalities, of imposing an imperious type of thought or practice on their associates. This is a real danger. Many people are content to submit to a stronger will

simply because it saves them the trouble of thought and decision, and this tempts leaders or teachers to aim at producing echoes rather than independent characters. But complete deference, even to the dominion of a good person, is a paralysis of the soul. The Christian character is not the acceptance of correct opinions or the practice of right conduct, in imitation even of the saintliest and wisest of our acquaintance. "Example," said Burke, "is the school of mankind, and they will learn at no other." This is not so, and it would be a pity if it were. Example is strong, but its object is to reveal the wide and universal truths of which no single life, however large its attainment, can be the perfect embodiment. The revelation of this Life, which Jesus has disclosed, is richer than the most gifted and admirable Christian can possibly interpret to us. Paul does appeal to these untrained Christians at Philippi to imitate his example, and learn from him how to love as Christians. But he tells them to keep their minds open to all that is true and just and pure and noble in life. The eighth verse of this chapter precedes the ninth, deliberately. For one thing, there are some natures which are more susceptible to ideas and principles or to tradition than to living persons. For another thing, even those who respond to the influence of a great character need to be reminded that the purpose of God is not stereotyped in the very

finest lives of the saints. The best have their limitations. They certainly make us ashamed of our narrowness and indolence. What we see and admire in them, the Christlike qualities of their example, their passion for truth, their integrity, their moral beauty, their calm faith, their generosity—all this thrills us with a sense of what can be done by a soul responsive to the Highest. We feel that if we only do as they do, and copy them even faintly, God also will be with us; and it is so. Yet these examples may be outgrown in part. Indeed, they point us steadily beyond themselves. Over and above them there is a larger region, with ampler air, in which we are also summoned to breathe, to *think* for ourselves, and to think not exclusively on this type or that of Christian experience, not on any saint or hero of the faith, lest our very admiration should be the means of crippling our moral and spiritual growth, but *on whatsoever is true and just and pure and excellent.*

XIII

FORGETTING TO PRAY

God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.—1 SAM. xii. 23.

XIII

FORGETTING TO PRAY

THE old man might have felt aggrieved. Israel had resolved, against his advice, to have a king, and Samuel's protest had been overborne. Popular feeling demanded a change of organization in order to meet the rising needs of the age, but Samuel clung to the old order of things, and this is his final, dignified address to the people on the eve of the new departure. It is instinct with generous and unselfish patriotism. He rises above the level of retort and personal pique. Instead of venting his wounded feelings, he pleads that the people will at least continue to honour God's law and be faithful to their religious principles. *Turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake. Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.* As for himself, his services are still at their disposal. *Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will instruct you in the good and right way.*

These words are more than magnanimous, however. Samuel had begun his speech by challenging the people to convict him of any abuse of power during his past term of office. He ends by disclaiming any sins of omission in the future. *God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.*

Such is the inwardness of a genuine faith. Some sins of omission are due to ignorance, but others are more culpable—the sins of people who for various reasons give up a duty, although they know better. They are not reckless or high-handed; they simply drop the old task or practice. It ceases to have any place in their life. And this, as Jesus teaches, is more blamable than the other class of omissions. *That servant who knew his lord's will and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he who knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.* Jesus singles out for special reprobation those sins of omission which are due, not to moral weakness or some oversight, not to ignorance of duty, but to quiet and deliberate neglect. It is bad enough to be guilty of dulness and indolence, but He is thinking and speaking here of people who tacitly allow some of their divine obligations to become a dead letter.

Sensitiveness to things undone is a mark of real maturity in our religion. "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done,

and we have done those things which we ought not to have done." The old confession not only acknowledges sins of omission, but puts them before sins of commission. Whereas the average tendency is to gloss them over. And why? For one thing, because many of them hardly alter the exterior of life. If a man gives up the habit of intercessory prayer, for example, who detects it? The offence does not strike at the visible interests of the Christian society; it need not betray itself by any glaring breach of outward conduct. Still, this inward neglect of prayer is a wrong done to God and to himself as well as to others. Any one may tell a lie without opening his lips. By his very silence he may become an accomplice in cruelty or falsehood. And by simply ceasing to pray for others a man may be as culpable in the sight of God as if he had defrauded or oppressed his fellows. *To him who knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

Sooner or later the bystanders notice any failure on our part to perform our social duties, but God only knows whether we pray for our fellows or not. Samuel's prayers were doubtless part of his public work. The psalmist reckons him among the three great intercessors for Israel—

> *Moses and Aaron among his priests,*
> *Samuel among them that call upon his name;*
> *They called upon God, and he answered them.*

But while these official duties of intercession

might have been performed, it is also true that Samuel could have continued to act as a religious adviser to Israel without praying secretly for them, and no Israelite would have been a whit the wiser. The old man might have gone in and out among the people, discharging what we call his professional religious duties; but none need have suspected for a moment that he had given up bearing them on his heart before God. It is possible for the spirit of prayer to ebb out of our religious activities. Those who are beside us cannot overlook our private devotions. They may be unable to detect any perceptible change in our behaviour and attitude; and yet a change does creep slowly over our characters. We grow less hearty and eager; a temper of impatience and irritation asserts itself; people begin to notice a difference in our tone which they can more readily feel than define, an unduly critical note in our words, an attitude of detachment from the general body, a disposition to dwell upon our rights and wrongs. They may be puzzled to account for it; but, if they only knew, it is simply the insidious result of ceasing to pray.

"We hardly discover a sin," Donne writes, "when it is but an omission of some good, and no accusing act." This is the worst of sins of omission; they elude our notice, unless our conscience is on the alert. Where do we begin to injure others? Not simply by open acts of indifference

or selfishness, but deeper down, in the place of intercession, where the God who entrusts us to one another expects each of us to bear those for whom we are specially responsible in the arms of our faith and love. God hears the snapping of the cords, when a human soul breaks loose from the restraints of charity and service. But He also hears, what no one else hears, the dead silence of the heart, when prayer is given up. It is a vital sin, and one of those which only the mature seem fully to recognize as vital. "In my younger years," Richard Baxter owned, "my trouble for sin was most about my actual failings in thought, word, or action. But now I am much more troubled for inward defects and omissions, or want of the vital duties or graces in the soul. These wants are the greatest burden of my life." Baxter, like Samuel, was well up in years when he made this confession. But such a ripening sense of personal religion need not be reserved for the autumn of life. The fear of leaving things undone, and especially a watchfulness against the neglect of prayer upon any pretext, is a cardinal factor in the life to which as Christians we are summoned.

"Oft I think my prayers
Are foolish, feeble things; for Christ is good
Whether I pray or not . . . and then I stop
And feel I can do nought towards helping men,
Till out it comes, like tears that will not hold,
And I must pray again for all the world."

The impulse belongs to our deepest experience as believing men. Our relations to our circle may be prosaic and irritating enough, our responsibilities more or less informal. But none of us is equal to them, such as they are, unless in his heart of hearts he is breathing the spirit of this great word: *God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.*

XIV

THE ABUSE OF RELIGION

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the marketplaces.—MATT. xi. 16.

XIV

THE ABUSE OF RELIGION

In his ode on Immortality Wordsworth has drawn the imitative, imaginative child. Take him, says the poet, at the age of six—

> "See at his feet some little plan or chart,
> Some fragment from his dream of human life,
> Shaped by himself with newly-learnèd art:
> A wedding or a festival,
> A mourning or a funeral;
> And this hath now his heart,
> And unto this he frames his song;
> But it will not be long
> Ere this be thrown aside,
> And with new joy and pride
> The little actor cons another part,
> As if his whole vocation
> Were endless imitation."

This is native to the child's health and charm, this elastic power of being able to respond quickly to various emotions or impressions. But what is pretty and even natural in childhood may be a weakness afterwards. Make-believe is never the staple of a mature life, and it is a thin character which has no higher vocation than reproducing

indiscriminately a series of passing phases in religion or in anything else. Jesus, looking at some of His contemporaries in Galilee, declared that their attitude towards the gospel reminded Him of nothing so much as of children, of children at play—and at play *in the market-places*, where serious business was afoot. Matters of life and death are being transacted on every side. The deepest interests of men and women are engaged. But what is it all to the children? They play on at their games, quite unconcerned. Now and then they will turn, as the whim takes them, to copy the gestures of a marriage procession or to mimic a funeral; but, be it dance or dirge, they remain upon the outside, strangers to the inward reality of what crosses the line of their vision. You Galileans, said Jesus, are as childish. You are trifling with life in the very sphere of serious interests. All you are fit to do is to play with the forms and phases of religion; while earnest people are putting heart and soul into it, upon its sombre or its joyful side, most of you are simply amusing yourselves with it, instead of allowing your hearts to be penetrated by its convictions and appeals.

The Galileans were a volatile and dramatic race. Josephus, who commanded their troops during the Jewish war, describes how he fell into sudden disfavour with them, and how the people expressed their resentment by conducting a mock

funeral of himself in his own presence, placing his effigy upon a gorgeous bier, and going gravely through the burial ceremonies. Jesus marked the same sort of fickle, imitative tendencies in their treatment of Himself and John the Baptist. They were captious and careless. Their approval or their disapproval was practically valueless as evidence of deep religious feeling. Religion to them amounted to an entertainment of the mind and heart, and they did little more than observe and, when it pleased them, reproduce the religious movements of the age, without any intention of committing themselves to what was, after all, for them no more than a new part to be conned and dropped.

Religion is abused when the so-called religious interest becomes censorious. *John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He has a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Here is a glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!* This censorious temper Jesus pronounced simply childish. What disturbed these Galileans was not John's austerity nor the genial tone of Jesus, but the divine intensity which led both to make inconvenient demands upon fastidious natures. There are people who can always find some plausible excuse for setting aside a religious appeal. They show a perverted ability in tabling objections to any form of religion, ascetic or otherwise, which

impinges on their aloofness. What they really dislike is not this or that expression of religion; it is religion itself. A man may have puritan sympathies, or his disposition may be towards the larger and more catholic aspects of the faith. One form of Christianity may seem to him too sensational, another too formal; one too rigid, another too lax. But the main point is, does he want any of them? And the danger is that if fault-finding is indulged, one gets into the way of being childishly determined not to be pleased at all, and of secretly discovering some colourable pretext for declining religion altogether.

Censoriousness is mainly superficial, but religion is abused not only when exception is taken to features which are for the most part external, but also when attention is devoted to such elements. *Children sitting in the market-places call to their companions and say, We piped to you, but you did not dance; we wailed, but you did not beat your breasts.* They piped and wailed, but their impressionable, petulant natures experienced no strain in passing from one whim to another. It was imitation, not experience, and the imitation cost them nothing. Many a Pharisee could, and perhaps did, affect the behaviour of John. Many an impressionable Galilean could copy the outward demeanour of Jesus. But in either case it was a piece of play-acting, and it is so still. People can discuss and compare the

varieties of religion, to their heart's content; they may be able to repeat its language, and to reproduce some of its phases, even to proselytize on behalf of their particular form. Yet, in many instances, it is perfectly obvious to any one who is inside that this is simply trifling with the surface.

The result is that religion is further abused by being treated sentimentally. Some years ago one of our Indian civil servants described the average Filipino as a moral wreck, "light-minded, easily caught by glitter and show, as irrational and inconsequent as a child." A Roman Catholic, "he knows little or nothing of the faith to which he nominally belongs, but he hates and despises all others. The laws of his Church are exacting, but they do not trouble him at all, for unless he be stretched upon his deathbed and beset with superstitious fears, he can very rarely summon the energy necessary to obey them. He delights in feast-days, because they appeal to his sense of glitter, and afford him opportunities for outbursts of the appalling music of which he is passionately fond." This analysis of the Filipino's religion recalls the childish Galilean temperament of which Jesus speaks. Even when the Galileans did imitate John or Jesus, they were *like children.* A child's emotions are easily stirred. These Oriental boys and girls could throw themselves hysterically into the sport of mimicking a funeral or a wedding, with all the gravity of a child's

ardent imagination. Their little faces would grow hot and bright; their words would ring out clearly; their very gestures would be quite in keeping with the play. But, when all was said and done, the matter got no further than their feelings.

The gift of being impressed is always valuable; still there is no moral value in being content to feel moved, and to let that be all. Jesus has only sorrowful indignation for the æsthetic or emotional appreciation of the gospel, which is impatient of any searching and thorough discipline for the will. How can there be any religion without the willingness to come under definite obligations to God? To be sentimental, according to George Meredith, is to enjoy without incurring obligation, and in the sphere of Christian experience this means to mistake self-gratification for moral passion, to amuse the intellect with convictions on which we have no serious intention of acting, and covertly to admire ourselves for our religious emotions and aspirations. To treat the gospel thus is to abuse it. There is a fatal tendency to stop short with the theory of some religious belief, as if that absolved us from the need of going any further. And on the emotional side, the danger is even more obvious. Discussion for discussion's sake, feeling for feeling's sake—that is what, with unconscious irreverence, we often allow to determine our relations with religion. It

corrupts reason and emotion alike, and it interposes a barrier of unreality between the soul and Christ.

The levity with which people will accept the gospel is sometimes more astounding than the levity with which they permit themselves to dismiss it. Their reasons for devotion are at times even more undesirable than their pleas for incredulity. And yet, if our connection with Christianity is nothing better than a mixture of captious criticism and transient enthusiasm, with a dash of graceful posing thrown in, we are in danger, like these Galileans, of just playing with Christ's religion—playing, too, *in the marketplace*, surrounded by the realities of life and death, where business has to be done with God. The grace and gospel of Jesus are too serious to be thus trifled with. Their genius and office are not to be profaned by æsthetic handling either in the pulpit or in the pew. Whatever we do with them, there is one thing that we dare not do, and that is to persist in treating them as if they represented a phase or fashion of the age which we are at liberty to take up and to lay down at pleasure.

XV

THE UNREADY GUEST

Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?—MATT. xxii. 12.

XV

THE UNREADY GUEST

COMMUNION with God has rarely been reckoned an easy thing. In primitive religion it was usually bound up with the belief that some rite must be carefully performed, or some gift duly offered, by the participant. For all its limitations and extravagances, sacrifice stamped this elementary sense of requirement upon the conscience of the human race. The ritual of the altar was not invariably favourable to spirituality, or even to morality, but it had the virtue of maintaining upon the whole a widespread conviction that kinship with God was not a matter-of-fact relation which required no special effort from men.

With the change of the centre of gravity from ritual to spirit came a new peril—or, at least, a new phase of moral peril—that of slackness and presumption. The very inwardness of the gospel was made to justify an easy-going temper. The abolition of outward sacrifices by Jesus Christ tended, in some natures, to relax the need of reverent care and thought, especially as the requirements were now shifted to the sphere of

the will and conscience, where self-deception is much more easy than in the punctilious discharge of ritual or routine. Men often forget that the more inward a demand becomes, the keener is its edge. It is harder to make sure of truth in the inward parts and of moral purity, than to offer the requisite number of animals, or to go on a pilgrimage. We may deceive ourselves about the one class of requirements; we cannot about the other. Thus, while the first difficulty of the gospel is to be taken at all, the next is to be taken seriously, upon the terms and conditions of God Himself.

Jesus anticipated this danger. Or rather, He found it already among some of his contemporaries. He spoke this little parable to people who were prone to be cool and complacent in their new attitude towards God. *The kingdom of heaven is like a king who made a marriage feast for his son. . . . And when he went in to see his guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment.*

(1) The unready guest, in this word-picture, is often the dull man. He believes in God; but, as Froude says somewhere of Sir Robert Cecil, "he believes in God in a commonplace kind of way." His faith makes no great alteration in his views or habits. He is fairly well satisfied with himself, and he finds it hard to conceive how God can be

otherwise. To every one else the contrast between him and his religious profession is patent. But he does not see it, and he would resent any suggestion of it from his fellow-worshippers.

Upon natures of this type the cost and care with which God makes the offer of fellowship real, seem to be thrown away. Jesus brings this out explicitly in the parable. The thrice renewed invitation, the preparations in the house, and so forth—all these set out the heartiness of God's welcome. But a dull faith remains untouched. The unready guest is one who does not perceive any need of a corresponding effort upon his part to reset his ideas and rearrange his habits. And that is why he finds himself outside the secret. For no one need expect to enter into the fellowship of Christ out of mere good-nature or affability.

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? The prophet's deep answer was: *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* It is something to feel that God requires anything from His worshippers. But we are not left to our unaided efforts, to whet the conscience for this service. Reverence cannot be worked up by ourselves. We need to look outside and above our lives, if we are to be inspired and subdued. God shows us

what is good. And in this parable of Jesus His requirement is pressed upon man from two sides. *A certain king made a feast. . . . And when he went in to see his guests, he said, Friend.* The magnificence of God's relation to ourselves should impress the conscience. To be a Christian, to have access to God, is a royal privilege. There is a splendour in faith, a moral grandeur in our approach to God, which should forbid any nonchalant airs and undue familiarity. And then there is the gracious, personal affection of it: *the king said, Friend.* Such is the footing of intimacy upon which God desires to place us; His aim is to be on the closest terms with those whom He has called and chosen. Thus by the sovereignty of our faith, and by the tenderness of Him who has thought nothing too good for us, we are meant to be roused from slovenliness and irreverence, asking, *What doth the Lord require of me?* What rearrangement of my life does He demand?

(2) The unready guest may be also the frivolous man. *Friend, how camest thou in hither not having* (as thou art well aware) *a wedding garment?* This is not the frivolity of deliberate irreverence but of graceful unconcern, and it is more subtle than the temper of dulness. It is the special temptation of those who find religious privileges coming round to them in the course of the Church's year, but who accept them without

any throb of personal concern. They are perfectly aware of this, but they do not think it matters very much. "It is a seemly and social act," they reflect—if they reflect at all; "this is expected of a man in my position."

Is it any wonder that such conventional and superficial approaches to God prove disappointing? There is no meeting between Christ and the soul which feels that it could get on without Him, should things so fall out. Jesus is known as He is needed, not otherwise. The self-satisfied guest who strolls in to the feast with an off-hand air, in a spirit of idle curiosity or social deference, knows nothing of its inner meaning. Communion meets us with God's desire deep in the heart of it; and it needs our desire, if anything satisfactory is to come of it.

(3) Finally, the unready guest may be the suspicious man. We often fail because we don't feel any difference between ourselves and God, or because we lack personal desire for Him; and again, because we have no devotion to Him. The suspicious man hesitates to commit himself. If he were to put on the wedding robe, he would stamp himself as pledged to the consequences. And he is not prepared for that just yet. He is reluctant to go all the way. Until he is perfectly satisfied that the feast is a fact, and the invitation genuine, he considers it prudent to run no

risk of being made to look uncomfortable or undignified.

Many years ago Sir Edwin Arnold described the attitude of the Japanese towards the supernatural as one of "politeness towards possibilities." A faith of that kind, though faith is too fine a term for it, will never carry life into deep and satisfying convictions. Whoever reached the secret of Jesus, cherishing as he went the secret fear that it might turn out a mistake? Nothing can shut us off so effectually from the knowledge of God as the uneasy suspicion that after all our religion may betray us into foolishness before the outside world, or compromise our dignity, or leave us awkwardly in the lurch. We must meet God's generous welcome in Christ with a venture of the whole life. It must be all or nothing. The doubtful mind, which is at best polite towards the possibilities of the gospel, which never lets itself go frankly, which is ready to draw back in the event of being disappointed—that mind does no justice to God; it remains a stranger to the inward meaning of His fellowship and to the reasons of His gracious revelation.

When the outward setting of our worship seems to promise fellowship between God and ourselves, even then and there something may shut us out from the secret of the Lord. That secret is with *them that fear Him*, with the reverent spirit which

is sensitive to His requirements. If the revelation of His grace stirs any sense of the moral difference between ourselves and Him, if it elicits an output of the will, then only may we hope to be His guests indeed, to enjoy what He has prepared for those who love Him, to enter into His real presence—and have no questions asked.

XVI

AFTERWARDS

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. . . . Ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected.—HEB. xii. 11 and 17.

XVI

AFTERWARDS

The voice of the present does count for something, but it is not everything. A prudent man knows that what happens to him to-day does not stand by itself; it has consequences stretching into the far future, and the measure of a man's power largely depends upon his ability to forecast the issues of some present decision or experience, instead of surrendering himself to the wooing of a pleasure or the stab of a pain as if nothing else was to be thought of. Both do seem to shut out every other consideration. The gratification of the moment may dazzle us, till we are blind to the consequences of our indulgence, just as trouble sometimes engrosses all our faculties. We may have very little leisure, and still less liking, to imagine what these may bring in far-off autumns. Our feelings are generally short-sighted. For the time being it is difficult to look past them. Yet we dare not abandon ourselves to them, recklessly or desperately, as if this experience were the be-all and end-all of things. For it will pass, leaving us different people, changed for better or

for worse, according as we have behaved ourselves in the sharp crisis, when imperious delights and as imperious pains demand to be treated as if they were everything. The right behaviour is to stop and reflect, "Yes, this may be very well: but —there is an 'afterwards.'"

Short views are wise, in trouble. They are also essential to some forms of heroic self-sacrifice, when we must not stop to weigh the consequences to ourselves. But there are passages of experience in which we can only hope to see our way clear by letting the imagination rise to look over the present into the future.

One of these passages is the discipline of trouble. *Chastening always seems for the moment to be vexatious, instead of delightful: but afterwards* those who have gone through the disconcerting process find that it has ripened their characters. *Chastening* is not simply punishment or repression. It is the larger process of moral and spiritual education by means of which God aims to develop our nature harmoniously. Here, as elsewhere, education involves subjection for the time being to some unpleasant and irksome experiences. But these do not come by accident or arbitrarily. There is a reason for them. They may not be your choice, says the writer; still, they are chosen for you wisely and kindly, even the privations and delays and hardships which are often so hard to bear and so slow to clear. When

such losses and crosses check us, it is easy to let ourselves be ruffled and irritated. Our judgment tends to be hasty; we may blame God unfairly, and doubt His good faith. But the remedy for this impatience is to believe that He is slowly educating us, and that the broad purpose He has in view will later on justify the upsetting experience of to-day. There is an *afterwards* as well as a *present* in our chastening, and the one grows out of the other. The moment's trouble comes up to our very eyes and ears. We are tempted to be engrossed with it, as if it were the climax, instead of being only a part of the divine process. *Chastening always seems for the moment to be vexatious: but afterward it yieldeth fruit.* That is the clue to its existence for us. It is not a stone flung ruthlessly or carelessly upon the even tenor of your ways. It is a seed—*it yieldeth fruit.* There is promise of ripeness and vitality in this strange experience. It tears up the surface of life, only to let the germs of higher good sink into the soil and win a better chance of growth. But you must recollect that between the dropping of the seed and the plucking of the fruit cold rains and winds will intervene. When they do intervene, never imagine that such apparent mishaps and delays are God's last word and touch.

The sombre aspect of this truth concerns those who trifle with consequences. One class is tempted to say about discipline, "No good will

ever come of this"; the other class, face to face with self-indulgence, reflect, "No harm will come of this." The objects of passion sometimes are so vivid and fascinating that a man determines to have them, come what may. He is *like Esau who for a single mess of meat*—for the red pottage that appealed irresistibly to his momentary hunger—*sold his own birthright. . . . You know how afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected.* Later on, such natures waken to discover that they have lightly bartered away some birthright of innocence or health or service which cannot be recovered by any passion of regret.

John Stuart Mill says that his father considered the majority of miscarriages in life were attributable to the overvaluing of pleasure. It is a plain fact, at any rate, that men and women are capable of shutting their eyes to all considerations of the future, in order to gratify the sudden passion of the moment. They lack self-control largely because they lack imagination. They have no sense of perspective, morally. They are often charming companions, with plenty of zest and impulse; but the near thing is generally the great thing for them, and to secure this immediate, material interest they will not hesitate upon occasion to sacrifice even their prospects and reputation. People do that over and over again. They do not even say they will take the risks. Often

they will not believe that there are any risks. Well, they get their red pottage. And *afterwards? You know*, says the writer, what happens later on. *You know how Esau afterwards was rejected, when he would fain have inherited the blessing.* Passion begins by arguing that there is no harm in letting nature have its swing. It is blind, wilfully blind, to any *afterwards*. And then, with jaded appetite, people discover that the argument failed to take consequences into account, and that life may in a moment part with some possession which neither tears nor time will avail to restore.

For encouragement and for warning, therefore, we are bidden hold fast to the perspective which our faith supplies to life. It is not enough even to believe vaguely in consequences. Consequences are not always what we expect. What seems to promise ample and secure satisfaction may turn out to be a source of weakness and annoyance; what appears at the moment to be nothing but a cruel and punishing bit of experience may ripen into a moral profit which we would have been sorry indeed to miss, for all the earlier discomfort it imposed. *Afterward* you may bitterly regret what you said or did in a moment of passion. *Afterward*, also, you may be thankful that you did not break down under some trying discipline of God, or that you did not break away from Him. The point is to believe that to-day has wider issues than are visible at present. And that is one service

rendered by our faith; it enables us to keep our heads and to keep our ground, when the nerves or the passions of life threaten to master us. If you ever feel almost driven to let everything go, think of the grey *afterward* that follows all impatience, impatience under God's trial and impatience for a taste of the world's pleasure.

XVII

THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE PROVINCIAL

And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.—JUDGES xiii. 25.

XVII

THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE PROVINCIAL

BEFORE the young lad Samson passed out to his public career in Israel, *the Spirit of the Lord*, it is written, *began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.* These movements were probably freshets of the wild passionate tide of strength which afterwards swept him into exploits of terror and chivalry throughout the country. Zorah and Eshtaol were two country towns looking down on the inland plateau that ran up through cornfields and vineyards to the central hill-range of Judæa. Travellers speak warmly of the fair nursery for boyhood afforded by the spot, but what interests the historian is its confined scope, not its beauty. It is the restrictions, and not the scenery, of the place which appear suggestive to him. There, even there, on a limited and provincial scale, high impulse and divine promptings did not fail to touch the soul; God's purpose did not wait to reach Samson till he had left the familiar and domestic sphere behind him. Such is the point and message of the words.

The quiet and honourable acceptance of a straitened lot seldom is in fashion. The feeling of rebellion surges up not only in the young but in the middle-aged, wherever life is tempted to chafe against the pettiness of circumstances which appear inadequate to its just powers and hopes. A cry goes up which, according to the individual's constitution, is a moan or a petulant outburst. The camp of Dan, they complain, is a veritable prison; nothing great or divine will ever come this way, and it is idle to expect it. So men will speak in their impatience, forgetting that even slow or dull surroundings may be made to yield materials to the thoughtful, and that the fault often lies with the person as much as with the place. Most people are summoned to stay for some time between Zorah and Eshtaol. The main difference in such natures is that while some see nothing but the narrowness of the sphere, others see all that and God also at their side. What profits it, the wise reflect, to dash with restive soul against the bars, refusing to try and make anything out of life till it is released into some more romantic and appreciative sphere? "Love," they would fain repeat to each other, in Andrea Del Sarto's words—

> "Love, we are in God's hand,
> How strange now looks the life He makes us lead;
> So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
> I feel He laid the fetter: let it lie."

Otherwise, however a life may claim our sympathy, or deserve, in a small degree, its own self-pity for some mistake of choice or perhaps a thwarted ambition, it is missing the opportunity of the valley. We are confusing a great experience and great surroundings. It is the erroneous idea, which ought not to survive the superficial judgments of our youth, that a golden setting is required for high careers. A moment's reflection will assure us that some of the finest gifts of example and inspiration ever presented to the world have emerged from lives that had for long, and occasionally to the very end, to endure a lot of comparative restriction and obscurity. At any rate it is never any mark of greatness to despise one's surroundings. "Don't allow yourself," wrote Jowett to Professor Nichol in 1864, "don't allow yourself to become that most miserable and contemptible of all characters, a disappointed man." It argues not strength but weakness to cherish feelings of being ill-used or overlooked, or to resent a provincial sphere as if it forbade the entrance of high purpose and divine endeavour. No circle is mean and dull if its centre is found in God. *Between Zorah and Eshtaol* there is space for Him to begin His work, if only life is cleansed from the acrid poison of complaint.

Temporary limitations need not avail to restrict the interests of life, any more than the humblest

valley shuts off its inhabitants from the pure glory of the sky and the ministry of the seasons. Men like White of Selborne, in science, for example, have risen nobly to the opportunity of the provincial. His life was spent in one of the flattest counties in England, and its scope was never extensive; yet what a rich use he made of his chances of observation! James Smetham, the Wesleyan artist, is another case in point. His Letters form a treasury of counsels on this management of the narrowed sphere. But Millet is perhaps the supreme instance of a rich artistic nature moved to expression and achievement amid straitened means and obscure surroundings. The unromantic plot of country round Cherbourg, which formed his early sphere, enabled him to enter into the pathos and worth of labour, simply because he was sensible enough to let the spirit of beauty thrill and inspire him for the interpretation of that peasant life, with its aching sorrows and piety and toil, which hemmed him in. Too enamoured of his mission to scorn his grey lot, Millet suffered no dreams of Paris to spoil the real opportunity of his existence in the French hamlets. Between his Zorah and Eshtaol he discovered that his genius had ample room, after all, to breathe and blossom.

Much of our repining on this score is sheer foolishness! People think it fine to fling out against outward repression or social depression,

to brood over thwarted ambitions, and refuse to do anything because they cannot achieve their cherished dreams. At any rate, they should remind themselves, God's Spirit can always make a beginning. One does not require to go to the high places of the world for stimulus to kindness, sunny temper, truth, mercy, fidelity, and cheerfulness. Legitimate ambition is one thing; an idle craving for fame and gain is another. To be contented with one's limitations may denote a moral declension. It may be a mark of littleness. But it need not be. Often it is a note of genuine strength and of self-restraint, of openness to that divine Spirit which is ever finding its way down into humility and trust and patience, the Spirit which, centuries later than Samson, in another valley north of that hero's home, moved One to *be subject to His parents*, and, through years which were neither blank nor feeble, to grow in obscurity, but also *in favour with God and man*. The glory of human life lies, after all, in its spirit, not in its surroundings. And the priceless qualities of trust and truth can be cultivated in a quite undistinguished environment, if only one keeps the narrow fields clear of hot protest and withering grudges against God and man. Within the mean enclosure, *between Zorah and Eshtaol*, there is room for the great God. The time may come for a wider sphere. But meanwhile this experience of discipline and training is the

stuff out of which God chooses to fashion men and women for the larger lot. The efficiency of to-morrow depends on the cheerfulness and contentment of to-day. For if thoroughness, unselfishness, and self-control are not learnt in the earlier stages of life, they are seldom, if ever, mastered fully afterwards.

Perhaps the word may be applied even further. Its range of suggestion is wide enough to cover the case of human lives which seem to miss any adequate sphere in the present world. For some people, owing to sickness or to misfortune, existence is a mere camp of Dan to the very end, in which God shows only the beginnings of His power. We see people die with capacities undeveloped, with interests which have not had the chance of blossoming, with faculties which appear only to pass away. What then? There are mysteries and tragedies, God knows. They confront us in the death of young children as well as of older people. But even as we stand perplexed over them, may we not say, without straining truth and reverence, that a faithful use of the little here below must surely qualify for fuller growth and service somewhere and somehow in the wider fields of God? Such is faith's argument and confidence. We cling to the reasonable belief that the Spirit which could but move life here to manifestations of forbearance and courage and submission amid the limitations of poverty or pain,

or within a few years of conscious life, will not fail to continue the work upon a larger scale beyond our human sight. So David Gray once ventured to hope, himself a man who—in our phrase—never came to his own. In his touching epitaph, on a life which scarcely managed to get past its early promise, he wrote—

> "Below lies one whose name was traced in sand.
> He died, not knowing what it was to live;
> Died while the first sweet consciousness of manhood
> And maiden thought electrified his soul,
> Faint beatings in the calyx of the rose.
> Bewildered reader, pass without a sigh,
> In a proud sorrow! There is life with God,
> In other kingdom of a sweeter air.
> In Eden every flower is blown. Amen."

That is the expression of a brave and just confidence in God. *Between Zorah and Eshtaol*, poor and bare as the soil may be, faith begins; the soul buds; character shows itself. To our bewildered eyes that may be well-nigh all. The rest—for there must be some further growth—is God's concern. And, after His beginnings here, "in Eden every flower is blown." Amen, and Amen.

XVIII

FEAR IN THE NIGHT

Behold, it is the litter of Solomon;
Threescore mighty men are about it,
Of the mighty men of Israel.
They all handle the sword, and are expert in war:
Every man hath his sword upon his thigh,
Because of fear in the night.

SONG OF SOLOMON iii. 7, 8.

XVIII

FEAR IN THE NIGHT

WHAT a vivid glance into the life of an Oriental monarch! Round Solomon's palanquin, decked with the luxury of the East, stand sixty chosen soldiers, fully armed, in order to ward off any nocturnal attack. The king's very sleep has to be protected against intrigues and conspiracies within the palace. When night falls it brings a peace which is haunted by the fear of assassination.

The uneasiness of the head that wears a crown has passed into a proverb, but proverbs are more often quoted than credited, and we may forget, in our envy of high rank, the well-worn story of its accompaniment. Our eyes are generally dazzled by the glitter of wealth and position when we look at those whose life seems to be one round of pleasure, apparently unvisited by any of the swarming cares that vex our lower level. It is only the sensible who stop to reflect that no success is without its penalties. The brilliant exterior often covers a hidden ache, a nervous fear, a

weariness that gnaws at the very heart of life. Some years ago an English journalist commented upon what he called a little human note in the magnificent reception accorded King Edward at Kiel. "The King," he said, "looked very pleased at his reception, but it was the subject of general remark that he looked pale and fatigued. It is always thus: there is a poor, tired, worried being behind all the show."

The recollection of what is behind the show might help to make us more considerate, for one thing. Misery does not always vaunt itself in rags and tears. There may be some secret *fear in the night* which haunts those who, in our vicinity, apparently have smooth and prosperous careers. And, for another thing, we might learn to be more contented with our own lot, instead of imagining that we could escape troubles by getting away to the high shores of the world where the tides of prosperity run brightly. Such positions are often won at the expense of heart's ease. The common sorrows of life cannot be evaded altogether by the brilliant and the wealthy; as a matter of fact, some of them strike such people with quite an added force.

At the same time, it is not by accepting an obscure lot or by reducing our ambitions that we can escape *fear in the night*. That far-off Oriental scene—the palace in the night with its unsleeping body-guard—is the counterpart of

human existence. Many people who know nothing about palaces know what it is to be kept awake by the dread of the nameless, noiseless power against which they have to summon a host of good resolves and firm beliefs. Uneasiness about our health or prospects, doubts as to our usefulness in life, anxiety about our families or about our ability to hold out against temptation, these and countless other forms of evil haunt us, waking or sleeping. What are God's sentinels against such vexing thoughts? How does He strengthen life in face of the disturbing elements in its environment?

(1) His first method of reinforcing us is by assuring us of the value of the soul. That is a conviction which brings its own peace and strength. Guards are set round what is precious, and man's first line of defence against the inroad of fear is the assurance that his life counts with his God, and counts greatly, even although he may seem to be numbered among

> "The mere uncounted folk
> Of whose life and death is none
> Report or lamentation."

This faith, which underlies all religion, is a moral stay of the inward life. When a man allows himself to doubt if his existence matters anything at all, he lays himself open to depression at every turn. As the sense of his personal destiny is

lowered, his sense of security also tends to diminish. But when he finds that God has honoured him with the calling and career of faith, he realizes that life is far too precious to be left at the mercy of accident or impulse. He finds a reason for thinking of himself as highly as he ought to think. It is not a conviction, remember, which wealth and success invariably tend to deepen. On the contrary, as our possessions accumulate, there is a danger of imagining that our life consists in these, instead of in the character of the possessor. Whatever be our lot outwardly, and sometimes the humbler it is the better, we must learn that God trusts us with life, that we are responsible to Him for this royal gift of personality, and that He in turn is responsible for us. We must recognize, in the light of Jesus, that it is not a matter of indifference what we make of ourselves. God cares for character supremely. We are born to a lordship of the spirit over the natural order, and it is by the conviction of this destiny and high calling that we become more watchful and calm and strong. No guard of high resolves and steady faith surrounds the man who is simply living for appearances and selfish ends. Trifling with character lowers our faith in human nature, in our own as well as in other people's. But when we take life on God's high terms, faith breathes into us a new dignity and self-possession; we become conscious of our personal worth to God

amid the changes and chances of the world; we are steadied by the revelation that the meaning of life's discipline is the growth of our souls into the likeness and the mind of Christ. He has an eternal purpose for us mortals, for each and all of us. In the thought of that, guaranteed by the life which Jesus has revealed and which He lives to realize, we can take refuge from disturbing fears about our future.

(2) Another sentry stands armed before the chamber of the soul: it is the instinct of danger. The sense of its own value prompts life intuitively to protect itself against peril. Our moral being seems to have a mysterious shrinking from temptation, which corresponds to the instinct that makes insects avoid contact with certain plants or animals. The innocent heart recoils at a touch of coarseness. Conscience warns, or rather it forewarns us against compromising associations, and the lurking sense of discomfort in certain pursuits or pleasures is often a wise movement of nature, not a mere caprice of dislike. "It is one great security against sin," as Newman said, "to be shocked at it." No doubt it is an instinct of repulsion which we may easily kill. But if we do harden ourselves to compromise with moral evil or to scoff at sin, the soul is left a prey to fear, and to worse than fear. To lose the sense of being ashamed at what once made us uneasy, is not a proof of moral strength; it is no evidence

of safety to become indifferent to what we are now pleased to dismiss as idle scruples and outworn prejudices. Moral purity and power are not ensured by any such hardening of conscience. What they need is a sensitiveness to evil, a jealous care of all that is clean and true and honourable, and a delicate regard for the sanctities and courtesies of life. It ought to be as natural for us in the spiritual as in the physical life to suspect and shrink from what would injure us. Such vague antipathies and aversions may sometimes be due to narrow training or to unenlightened prejudice, but they are often part of the defensive power granted by God to the human soul in a world where life is repeatedly surrounded by spurious and contaminating influences. We tamper with them at our peril.

(3) Finally, there is a safeguard of life in obedience to the will of God. "In His will is our peace," in knowing it, in doing it, and in bearing it. Restlessness is sometimes due to the secret feeling that we are following our own bent. And there is no peace for the wilful or the wayward. As soon as we sit loose to any of the duties in which the will of God meets us, the inward life becomes unsettled; it is a breach of harmony with the ruling purpose of our world, and through the breach excitement and unsteadiness creep in. When people are constantly on the outlook for

self-gratification, whether their pleasures are refined or low, when they clutch at all that comes their way and fret when they miss it, when their chief thought is about their own rights and wishes, it is no wonder that this self-will dissipates their inward peace of mind. Restlessness is the inevitable result of depending upon external things like popularity or ambition for the interests of life. It is duty that steadies us. The surrendered will enters into the quiet strength of God's will as a will of goodness and love. It is a peace to know that, whatever comes, we are where He meant us to be. This consciousness puts meaning and strong hope into our hearts as nothing else can do. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you*, said Jesus on his last evening. He could say that, because He could also say: *As the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.*

Be our circumstances or surroundings, therefore, what they may, here are the safeguards of the soul, within reach of the humblest and indispensable to the strongest and most fortunate. For the threshold of fear can be crossed so easily! Harassing care and dread can thrust their way in, no matter what is our age or income or position. And where is our defence, where but in God's faith and faithfulness, worked into the moral experience of those who keep in touch with the realities of His life?

"It lies not on the sunlit hill
Nor on the sunlit plain:
Nor ever on any running stream,
Nor on the unclouded main.—

But sometimes through the soul of man,
Slow moving o'er his pain,
The moonlight of a perfect peace
Floods heart and brain."

Moods of relief and quiet come thus. But not the deeper peace of God. These sentinels of life —faith in the supreme value of the human soul, the instinct of danger vouchsafed to the pure, and obedience to duty as God's will—these three stand constantly as the strong and quiet watchers of the threshold; while inside you and I, God's servants and children, can lie down and rise up, comparatively serene and cheerful, knowing that, once our requests are made known to Him, once our lives thus face Him humbly and trust Him with themselves, *the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall guard our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus.*

XIX

THE COMPENSATIONS OF GOD

Without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless he that comforteth the lowly, even God, comforted us by the coming of Titus.—2 COR. vii. 5, 6.

XIX

THE COMPENSATIONS OF GOD

PAUL was tossing on a broken sea of troubles at this moment. Not long before he had been driven out of Ephesus by a riot, and obliged to leave the local Christians in a crisis. He was now anxiously waiting in Macedonia for the return of Titus from a mission to the Corinthian Church, where some Christians had been misconducting themselves. *Without were fightings*—external attacks upon himself and the Churches; *within were fears*—concern and heaviness about the faith and behaviour of Christians for whom he felt responsible, especially about those in the south. Paul found the strain of waiting for his envoy almost intolerable. But one day Titus arrived with good news about the Corinthian Church, and the apostle's depression was instantly changed into relief and cheerfulness.

What enabled him to ride out the storm? Well, he was fast to three anchors.

(1) He seems to have been turning over one of his favourite chapters in the Old Testament. The phrase, *He that comforteth the lowly*, shows inci-

dentally where he had been looking for courage during the period of strain. It is a quotation from the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah, and that chapter was one of Paul's favourite passages. He evidently had it almost by heart. In the previous chapter he had already quoted the eighth verse: *At an acceptable time I hearkened to thee, and in a day of salvation did I succour thee.* In the great scene at Antioch, where he turned to the Gentiles, he is reported by Luke to have defended himself by citing the sixth verse: *I have set thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation to the ends of the earth.* Several other echoes of the chapter are to be heard throughout Paul's letters, and the reference here suggests that the phrases of it clung to his mind during the time of anxiety which had now closed. Probably he valued the chapter on account of its stress upon the freedom of the gospel for the nations. But what further attracted him was the fact that this was a chapter of encouragement for people who were tempted to fear that their work for God had proved a failure.

Here, then, is one means of holding ourselves open to receive God's compensations. When our surroundings are dumb and contrary, we can turn to God's Word. It is part of our equipment for the Christian service and experience to know our way to the great, calm passages of the Bible. You should have your favourite chapters or psalms,

and you should have them by heart. There are times when you may have little else to fall back upon, for the rallying of your faith.

(2) Unselfishness is another safeguard. Sympathy with other people may often seem to carry in its train more discomfort than pleasure. Those who are sensitive to the needs and errors of their fellow-men, and who endeavour to interest themselves in people who have any claim on them, suffer more than if they were content to be self-centred and indifferent. A genuine desire to help others is sure to bring pain and worry upon the unselfish; their feelings are sometimes harrowed by the sight of what men have to endure, and their very efforts to redress the wrongs and ameliorate the suffering may expose them only to unmerited ingratitude and even misconception. Yet, if they lay themselves open to anxieties and annoyances, they get compensations infinitely richer than the selfish ever dream of. Paul was thrilled by the good news from Corinth. The better resolves of his friends there sent a glow of unselfish pleasure to his heart. It was his keen sense of responsibility for them which had occasioned him these hours of distress, and it was through the same feeling, which knit him to their interests, that the new happiness arrived. There are people who, as far as possible, deliberately avoid interesting themselves in others and forming ties of responsibility, simply because they shrink from the worries and

expense which they anticipate will ensue from such associations. It is sometimes feasible to safeguard life by restricting it in this way. But the cultivation of an easy unconcern shuts out also the finer joys which we cannot have apart from the fuller and heavier responsibilities. There are divine compensations which never visit the self-centred. There is no room for them to enter, when the door is shut upon the duties and demands of human sympathy.

(3) Moral humility is another qualification for the experience of God's higher compensations. When Paul speaks of the God *who comforts the lowly*, he means that it is only the unassuming and humble who can receive this gift of God. It is easy to become moody and bitter when people disappoint us and work seems temporarily useless. We may feel we scarcely deserved to be treated in this way, and resentment against our fellow-creatures may slip into a sullen apathy or a nervous fear that God is not looking after us properly. We are lowered, but we are not lowly. We come down in the world or suffer some privation or defeat. But it makes us secretly chafe under the discipline.

Sensible people sometimes try to overcome this petulance by dwelling grimly on its absurdity. How unreasonable, they argue, to expect much from human nature! How stupid for puny man to protest against the dealings of the Infinite

Power which is over all human concerns. But, if this reading of life cleans out our petty pride, it fails to put in any moral comfort. We need a more Christian view of the situation, and Paul defines it by saying that the only secure position is the humble mind which makes no bargains with God, which realizes that we are God's, here for His ends and not for our own, here as His soldiers and servants. Strenuous souls are sometimes tempted to feel that their unselfish efforts have gone for nothing, and that there is no moral meaning in the world. *I have laboured in vain*, they cry with the author of the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah; *I have spent my strength for nought.* It is a dangerous mood to cherish. But, as they are strong, they will sooner or later pick up courage and wisdom to add: *Yet surely my recompence is with my God.* Honest service is not thrown away. There is a God who notes how men bear themselves, and who takes account of their dutifulness. If, during the course of the long campaign, whose plan is not disclosed to us beforehand in its details, our regiment is left for a time without orders, under a dropping fire, there must be some reason for it. Faith has enough heroism to stay where it is put, and to await God's justification of what has transpired. We can at least believe that it is not for us to question or to withdraw, in an aggrieved fit of petulance, muttering hard words about our treatment, but to remain where we have been left

until further orders arrive. Once we know we are at our post, we can be sure that our General on high will not expose us to unnecessary loss or prolong the strain unduly.

Even under the untoward discipline we get reminders of His thoughtfulness, if we are careful to notice them. Cowper, who knew from experience the black hours of despondency that occasionally visit life, put the whole secret into the first words of the Olney hymn—

> "Sometimes a light surprises
> The Christian while he sings."

The relief of God generally surprises life along that line. It is the cheerful, not the grumbling and defiant, who receive the compensations of God's comfort. Those who are trying pluckily to make the best of things and refusing to let their faith in God break down, those who will fail, if need be, with a smile and a cheer—it is they who are visited by God's rallying encouragements, as they swing with their three anchors out, a memory of God's word, a temper of unselfishness, and a humble, resolute conscience for their immediate duty.

Take, for example, our friendships. Paul realized at this time what an unspeakable solace it is to have a reliable friend. No doubt it was the good news from Corinth which relieved the apostle's anxiety, but often it is not anything our friend

brings which helps us. It is just himself. When we say good-bye to a friend, after he has been sitting with us, we are sometimes inclined to say to ourselves what Paul said about Titus: *God comforted me by his coming.* He may have said nothing about religion. Perhaps he was unconscious of our special trouble. His visit may have been, in our phrase, casual. But his presence, the sense that he is our friend, his power of taking us out of ourselves and making us feel that, after all, we are not isolated units—all this forms one of God's direct compensations to us. We go back to face our life, heartened and uplifted. It helps us to go through what we have to bear, if we can feel sure that we have two or three friends upon whose loyalty and sympathy we can absolutely rely.

God, who comforteth the lowly, comforted us by the coming of Titus. The incident of a friend's visit may be part of God's large providence of encouragement. Titus comes in many ways. James Smetham closes a letter with thanks to a friend for writing to him when he happened to be depressed. "Glad to get your friendly letter. It was like the coming of Titus. I think Providence in these days often sends Titus by post." But whether our friends rally us by personal intercourse or by correspondence, the great point is to recognize in them one of the divine compensations. This does not mean any obtrusive use of religious language about the matter. You may feel

that you cannot speak about your friends exactly as Paul spoke about Titus. You rightly shrink from the danger of falling into cant and unctuousness; you protest that it would not be natural for you to drag God's name into these simple and charming relations of companionship which mean so much to you. But it isn't a question of language, it's a question of spirit. What we must do is to recognize gladly that the moving of one heart to another is the work of God. He it is who prompts these instincts of thoughtfulness and affection and loyalty. It is not by accident that you and your friend come together. Your life and his do not cross and intertwine at random. The mutual interests, the exchange of thought, the moral stimulus, the close intimacy, the confidence which you enjoy in your friend, the affinities that draw men and women together across differences of age and position, are a wonderful providence. And they seldom seem so wonderful or so divine as when they help us, in some difficult hour, to compose our minds and keep our footing.

Without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless—the compensations of God surprise us on this side and on that. *Nevertheless he who comforteth the lowly, even God, comforted us by the coming of Titus.* There are good reasons for holding to our faith. *Nevertheless!* Against disadvantages and hardships there is something to be set. Things come together against us, things

press on us, we have sleepless nights and anxious days. *Nevertheless—God!* That is our supreme compensation, God's presence living and moving through it all. Fightings and fears cannot prevent Him from reaching behind the welter of circumstances and the unrest of inward fears to rally the dutiful and the devout who are resolved that, come what may, they will on no account surrender. His compensations are abroad and at work on our behalf. Nothing can keep them from us. Nothing in heaven or on earth can hinder their arrival.

> "Hast not thy share? on wingèd feet,
> Lo, it rushes thee to meet;
> And all that Nature made thy own,
> Floating in air or pent in stone,
> Will rive the hills and swim the sea,
> And, like thy shadow, follow thee."

Without are fightings, within are fears. Nevertheless—God!

XX

LOVE'S LABOUR

The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me:
Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever;
Forsake not the works of thine own hands.

Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

XX

LOVE'S LABOUR

OBSERVE, in these three lines, how the human soul can manage to rise above misgivings and discouragement. First, it is able to make a general statement about God: *The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.* This is one of those arguments from history and experience which underlie all religious faith. Such belief is a direct relief, because it assures us that God is concerned on our behalf and alive to our highest interests. But a general statement of belief is never quite the same as a formula. The confidence that God will persevere with us naturally rises into a cry of adoration and praise, addressed to God Himself: *Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, lasts for ever.* A believing man never makes any declaration about God without being inwardly moved. He has an intuition that his creed ought to be capable of being sung or prayed, and therefore, as he speaks about his God, he instinctively speaks to Him. Then adoration prompts an appeal. *Forsake not the works of thine own hands.* A man has something to say about God; then he has something to

say to God; and finally he has something to ask from God.

(1) It is taken for granted that we are willing to allow God to finish His purpose in our lives. *The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.* Faith cannot associate God with work half done, and yet our ideas of His precise purpose, and our conceptions of what His methods should be, are often extremely imperfect. His end in our life is the development of our characters into His own likeness; that object, the creation of moral and spiritual personalities, explains His discipline as nothing else can do. Our concerns are often details of health or fortune, personal enjoyment or ambitions for ourselves and our families. These engage our thoughts and occupy our minds. They are not always irrelevant to God's plan for us, nor to be brushed aside in an excess of spiritual fervour. *Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of such things.* But it may not be for our highest good to have these hopes and wishes gratified exactly as we would like. *Though I walk in the midst of trouble*, this psalmist wrote, *thou wilt revive me; thy right hand shall save me.* The road to a finished life may lie through the country of trouble, and not exclusively across a smooth experience where everything is to our mind, and where little or nothing occurs to ruffle our circumstances or upset our plans. After all, our highest concerns are those of character, and

any one who knows anything about the soul knows that there are lessons, finishing touches, ripening experiences for modesty and prayer and courage, which are never learnt so well as in the days of enforced patience and disappointed hopes, when we discover that happiness is not the greatest thing in life.

Unless we are prepared to look at things in this light, we cannot argue : *The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.* We need to give Him the right to work with us and for us. We must be ready to let Him bring out the best in us; which may mean that He does not spare us phases of discipline which we would gladly forego, and that He may have to withhold from us what we had secretly set our heart upon. Only, once we surrender our wills to His labour of love, though our faith may be as yet unimposing and our characters unformed, for us, as for the green corn in the furrow and the bud upon the bough, every day will steadily do something.

(2) When he realizes this, a man turns to his God with adoring confidence : *Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, endureth for ever.*

Lovingkindness is a better rendering than *mercy*. The word corresponds, according to Robertson Smith, "to the Latin *pietas*, or dutiful love, as it shows itself in acts of kindliness and loyal affection. It is a word of common life used of all those acts which acknowledge that those

who are linked together by the bonds of personal affection or of social unity owe to one another more than can be expressed in the forms of legal obligation." Well, this is a quality which is apt to pass too quickly from our interest in each other; it is the quality of a large and generous patience which will not stop at the mere letter of obligation, which repeatedly will make due allowance for defects and persevere in spite of ingratitude or misconception. Faults sometimes take a long time to disappear, and good habits are so slow of formation, that we are prone to grow tired of being responsible for others, or tired at any rate of doing more for them than is in the bond. Yet no one can succeed in rousing or training a human soul, without an immense amount of sheer patience and ungrudging forbearance. Unless we have the capacity for putting up with crudity and petulance, and of keeping our temper when people are dull or slow, we can do very little in the way of educating or ennobling them. Half the power of moral education, for example, lies in the faculty of seeing where faults really contain some germ of goodness, and where they are the rough expression of what may turn out, under proper training, to be a virtue. That capacity of insight, together with a strong belief in the possibility of growth and manliness, is what mainly helps younger natures to ripen. They need to be made to feel that our interest in

them is more than mechanical or punitive or professional.

Now the standing wonder of our lives is that God deals with them in this large and disinterested spirit, patient with their obvious shortcomings and also with their unwise zeal. His tie with us is not a legal compact. There is a prayer attributed by tradition to Queen Elizabeth: "O Lord, look upon the wounds of Thy hands, and forsake not the works of Thy hands." It is a sentence which expresses the order of the Christian's confidence in God. *He who began the good work* began it on the Cross. We dare not presume, but we can count upon His loyal kindness and His unfailing mercy, upon His knowledge of when we need to be punished or disappointed, upon His unerring sight of any promise in our faulty natures. The Cross of Jesus is our supreme reason for this belief in His perseverance. It ratifies the conviction that the footing on which God stands to us is broader than any legal obligation. *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. His compassions fail not. The long-suffering of the Lord is our salvation. He who began a good work in you will perfect it unto the day of Christ.* It is not His way to throw up the work when it grows difficult and exacting. We can hold to that thought of Him, and glory in it, when we consider all that went before the Cross and all that has come after.

(3) The thought passes involuntarily into a prayer: *Forsake not the works of thine own hands. Forsake them not:* do not discard them, do not drop them, like a craftsman tired of his task or disappointed with all that he has been able to make of his materials.

It is an appeal, we might almost say, to God's interest on the one hand, and to His sense of responsibility on the other. Such an appeal was natural in the ancient East, where skill and craft were largely personal accomplishments, which led the workman to take a special pride in what his hands had stamped as his and turned out as a proof of his artistic genius. So, says the psalmist, there is a personal tie between God and man, His handiwork; all that is best in our lives is His; it is He who has made us—at what cost of thought and toil!—and not we ourselves; He surely will not give us up.

> "Longsuffering and most patient God,
> Thou needst be surelier God to bear with us
> Than even to have made us."

There is a line in the great mediæval hymn, the "Dies Iræ," which Dr. Johnson could not hear or read without profound emotion; it is one of the appeals to God on the last day, *Tantus labor non sit cassus:* "Let not all Thy labour go for nothing." We feel this strongly as believers in Jesus Christ, and the feeling enters into our

reasons for believing in immortality. It contradicts our ideas of God to think that human character, with the moral and spiritual qualities which His creative power and redeeming grace have wrought out, should be liable to dissolution equally with the transient forms of matter. In the light of Jesus Christ we cannot bring ourselves to sum up God's work as Love's Labour Lost. We have an instinct that He will not suffer the needless waste which would be inevitable if our moral attainments and activities collapsed with the death of the body. It is a genuine intimation of immortality when we realize that the higher life of obedience and trust in man is ultimately the work of God's spirit labouring through time and space.

Naturally the worth and value of this argument rest on our present attitude of personal submission to His will as the supreme reality in life. We dare not pray unreservedly : *Forsake not the works of my hands.* Our sole right to fall back upon God's responsibility is derived from the absolute trust with which we are allowing Him to mould and control our lives. What reality could there be even in praying, *Forsake not the works of thine own hands*, if we were all the while taking things into our own hands and shaping our own ends, regardless of His authority?

And yet, how often we do thwart His purposes by our timidity or self-conceit! There is an old Greek legend about Demeter desiring to make her

foster-child immortal. She managed to begin her divine task by laying him within the fire upon the hearth. And

> "All night long amid the flames he lay,
> Upon the hearth, and played with them and smiled."

But the mother one night awoke and, screaming to see her babe apparently being injured, she snatched it from what she imagined was its cruel doom. The kindly purpose of the goddess was thwarted by the human interposition, and the boy grew up to be no more than mortal. A legend? Yes, but a parable of the way in which some people may contrive to hurt their souls by rashly and timidly interfering with what God would make of them, or by withdrawing their characters as far as possible from the fire of experiences which apparently are punishing. There is such a thing as being *perfected through suffering*. It was on the Cross that Jesus said, *It is finished*, and we ought not to feel surprised if God occasionally has to plunge us into fiery trials. What will really hurt us is to decline them, not to endure them. Let us not undo what He is carrying out. Never, by cowardice or impatience, be so short-sighted as to thwart His will. Pull yourself together to believe that even in strange dealings and dark hours He must be bent on executing some immortal design, and that the passing hardship may turn out to be the truest kindness. Let the

Lord do what seemeth to Him good. It is good, whatever it may seem to you in the heat and the confusion of the moment. Let Him have His way with you; it will be the way of Him *who, having loved his own that are in the world, loves them to the end.*

THE END

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